South Haven Tribune

$3

June 14, 2026

Photos provided / Tom Renner

South Haven Area Emergency Services, the South Haven Police Department and the beach enforcement attendants assisted the new lifeguards in a lifesaving incident on Tuesday morning.

SH lifeguards rescue swimmer

Defibrillator, CPR used to revive at South Beach

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven's newly reinstated lifeguard program intervened in a major lifesaving incident Tuesday morning on South Beach.

According to a news release, a swimmer exited the

See RESCUE, page A2

South Haven's newly reinstated lifeguard program helped an individual in lifesaving incident Tuesday on South Beach.

No one injured in SH plane crash

Pilot says plane lost power during attempted takeoff

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — No one was injured after a plane failed to take off and crashed Monday morning at the South Haven Area Regional Airport.

According to a report from the South Haven Area Emergency Services, a pilot in a single-engine aircraft escaped injury when her plane crashed

See PLANE, page A2

Photo provided / Tom Renner

Police inspect a plane that crashed during its takeoff Monday morning at the South Haven Area Regional Airport.

South Haven schools superintendent asks for raise

School board eyes different timeline for end of fiscal year

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven school board and Superintendent Ana Aleman-Putman had an animated discussion Wednesday night about the timeline of her salary increase.

ALEMAN-PUTMAN

"We were discussing, at this point all of the groups – teachers, custodians, para pros – have received a salary increase," Aleman-Putman told the board. "Typically, a superintendent receives a salary increase at their evaluation, which, mine was in December and it was good. I felt strongly that I should not receive an increase until everybody else had gotten their salary increases; so, I was the very last one."

After the board came out of closed session during Wednesday's regular meeting, the board discussed Aleman-Putman's request to move up the timeline of her pay increase to be applied in June instead of July.

"That was the big discussion, was when that increase should occur – because at this point our budget year ends at July," Aleman–Putman said. "I will have been the only employe that has not received an increase this year."

Board President Shawn Olney said trustees wanted to follow a process to evaluate and provide a "monetary raise to the superintendent."

Olney said the board had previously discussed with Aleman-Putman her salary increase and planned to have it applied in July, at the end the fiscal year budget, when they would also have a mid-year evaluation with the superintendent.

"We wanted to do it in July ... so we can go over her goals and see where she's at," Olney said. "She is doing a great job; it (the salary increase) had to do with timeliness."

However, no decisions were made during Wednesday's meeting.

"Sometimes boards and superintendents work through complex issues," Aleman-Putman said. "I have a good working relationship with the board and I know that we'll work together to figure this out and we'll continue to work together to do what's best for the families and students of South Haven Public Schools."

Armory project

The board approved the proposed plan to repair the brick walls of the Michigan State Armory renovation project.

"The first floor, the brick wall building is three bricks wide and it goes down to two on the second floor," Director of Non-Instructional Services Kevin Dee said. "When we were in there doing work, we discovered that the ties that hold the brick together disintegrated and are no longer there."

Dee said they worked with the structural engineer and the brick institute to find a way to fix it and stitch the walls back together.

"It's basically two layers that are delaminating apart and separating, so we have to stitch them back together with ties and then fill the void with grout," he said.

The repairs will be a labor intensive project, however Dee said he's unsure of how long the repairs will take and how much it will cost.

The project is considered a T&M, which is contract type where the contractor are paid for the actual cost of the

See SUPER, page A2

OPINION

America won't save local journalism by ignoring newspapers

From AMERICA'S NEWSPAPERS

For the past two decades there has been growing interest in funding local news organizations. As local newspapers have come under increasing pressure from economic challenges and shifting media consumption patterns, community leaders have witnessed the negative impact on civic life.

In response, local, state and national philanthropic organizations have stepped forward to provide varying levels of support for journalism.

Much of that support, however, has focused primarily on launching new initiatives – particularly nonprofit local news organizations.

The conventional wisdom among many funders seems to be that the traditional newspaper model is no longer viable, so they are looking to support something different in the hope that a new model will provide the answer to sustainable journalism. Unfortunately, the past 20 years have shown that "new" does not necessarily mean "improved."

No single replacement model has yet demonstrated a scalable, long-term solution for local journalism. Many newspapers, meanwhile, have continued evolving their business models, investing heavily in digital journalism while also relying on a mix of revenue streams that may include print and digital.

In recent years, a number of new nonprofit and digital news outlets have closed despite receiving substantial philanthropic support. One notable example is The Houston Landing, which quickly burned through its initial $20 million in seed funding but failed to build the audience and recurring revenue necessary for long-term sustainability. The organization produced excellent journalism, but strong journalism alone was not enough to support the business. There are many other examples, though most received far less funding and attention.

According to LION Publishers and the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), two newer trade associations serving the new breed of digital news organizations, each organization has roughly 500 members. LION also estimates there are approximately 1,600 independent local news organizations across the U.S. and Canada, including nonprofit and for-profit digital publishers, so this segment is seeing some growth. We applaud the efforts of these organizations, many of whom are providing valuable journalism for their communities.

What we do not applaud is the lack of interest in supporting the local news organizations that still provide the overwhelming majority of local reporting in America.

Newspapers have spent decades adapting to changing technology, changing consumer habits, and changing business realities while continuing to produce the local reporting communities rely on every day. Many have invested aggressively in digital subscriptions, audience development, newsletters, video, podcasts, events, marketing services, philanthropy and other evolving business models. Innovation in local journalism did not begin with startups, and it is not happening only outside of newspapers.

Newspapers continue to employ thousands of journalists across the country, and millions of Americans still rely on them every day for local news and information. Their business model is unquestionably under pressure, but it has also proven more durable than many assume because newspapers typically operate with diversified revenue streams and longstanding relationships within the communities they serve. Some funders are reluctant to support newspapers because many operate as for-profit businesses. Yet communities benefit from local reporting regardless of ownership structure. If the goal is preserving journalism rather than choosing winners and losers, support should follow impact.

To be clear, we support the emergence of new local news organizations and genuinely hope they succeed. Strong

See NEWSPAPERS, page A2

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

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SH celebrates opening of Porter Legacy Dunes

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Area Recreation Authority and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy recently announced the opening of Porter Legacy Dunes on June 19.

According to a news release, the community is invited the grand opening at 11 a.m. where guests will have the opportunity to explore the loop trail and the boardwalk, enjoy scenic views from the elevated overlook and celebrate this important addition to our community's natural and recreational resources.

Porter Legacy Dunes will be a new fully-accessible natural area located adjacent to Pilgrim Haven Natural Area on the Lake Michigan shoreline.

"Porter Legacy Dunes is a beautiful, intact, 48-acre forested backdune just south of SWMLC's Pilgrim Haven Natural Area, which is known for its sweeping lake views and peaceful natural setting," the release stated. "SHARA and SWMLC worked together to protect Porter Legacy Dunes in 2020, with the support of a generous grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), as well as significant matching funds provided by SWMLC and its donors."

In 2022, the recreation authority received a $100,000 legacy grant from Energy-Corporation to design and begin development of the trail system at Porter Legacy Dunes. The land conservancy and the recreation authority worked with the National Park Service and graduate students from the University of Michigan on the design of the trail system.

"In 2024, SHARA secured a $300,000 MNRTF development grant to build the first phase of the new trail and boardwalk, supported by major additional funding from SWMLC and several of SWMLC's generous private donors, as well as a $100,000 grant match from Visit South Haven that helped make the award possible," the release stated.

This first phase of the trail and boardwalk system includes an accessible half-mile loop trail and a boardwalk that winds through scenic dunes leading visitors to an elevated viewing platform at the top of the sensitive dune complex.

"The boardwalk and viewing platform offer breathtaking views of Lake Michigan and the surrounding shoreline, while also protecting this rare, backdune habitat and the species that live there," the release stated.

The dunes were designed with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) guidelines and conservation of the natural area in mind.

"The project ensures that people of all ages and abilities can experience and enjoy the beauty of southwest Michigan's lakeshore," the release stated.

The preserve remains closed to the public until the grand opening. Preserve visitors must stay on the trail and boardwalk and stay off the dune and other natural areas to ensure the protection of the sensitive habitats.

"The Porter Legacy Dunes boardwalk creates an opportunity for everyone to connect with nature and experience the incredible beauty of our lakeshore," South Haven Area Recreation Authority Director Chris Van Hekken said in the release. "This project reflects our community's commitment to accessibility, conservation, and public recreation."

Although construction of the boardwalk is complete, additional amenities are still needed to make the site welcoming, comfortable and easy to enjoy for all visitors. Planned improvements include visitor support features such as seating areas and interpretive signage.

"Porter Legacy Dunes continues our strong partnership with SHARA," Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy Executive Director Mike Larson said in the release. "We're excited for this opportunity to manage and protect the rare natural features of this beautiful preserve, and to be part of creating more ways for people to enjoy and learn about nature, while also protecting it for the future."

The South Haven Area Recreation Authority owns the property and will maintain the human-made infrastructure on the preserve, while the land conservancy will protect the conservation values at Porter Legacy Dunes.

"Porter Legacy Dunes offers both a recreational destination and a lasting investment in accessible, natural outdoor experiences for many future generations," the release stated. "Community sponsorships and donor support will play a key role in providing the finishing touches and ensuring the long-term enjoyment of this unique natural asset."

For sponsorship opportunities or additional information, contact Chris Van Hekken at 269-637-0512 or via email at cvanhekken@shps.org.

More information can also be found at www.southhavenrecreation.org.

RESCUE

From page A1

water and was speaking with on-duty lifeguards when the individual suddenly became unresponsive.

"The lifeguard team immediately assessed the individual, initiated CPR and deployed an Automated External Defibrillator to revive the swimmer," the release stated.

South Haven Area Emergency Services, the South Haven Police Department and the beach enforcement attendants responded at 11:15 a.m. Tuesday to take over advanced medical treatment.

"The coordinated, multi-departmental response ensured an effective effort," the release stated.

The patient was transported to Corewell Health Lakeland in St. Joseph for further care.

PLANE

From page A1

while taking off from the South Haven airport.

SHAES and the South Haven Police Department responded at 9:30 a.m. Monday to a report of a downed aircraft in a field at the end of the runway near 72nd Street in South Haven Township.

The pilot – whose name was not released by authorities – reported the plane lost power during the attempted takeoff, and came to a stop in the nearby field.

Police said there was no fire and the pilot walked away from the crash.

The 21-year-old Diamond aircraft was based out of Goshen, Ind.

The incident has been reported to the Federal Aviation Administration and remains under investigation, according to South Haven police.

SUPER

From page A1

materials used – plus an hourly rate for the labor. Dee said the project is not to exceed $161,000.

Other items

The board approved the at-risk transfer from the general fund to the food service fund.

This is a regular requirement for the school to remain eligible for the at-risk funds. The district has to pay any amount up to $10 per economically disadvantaged student to the food service fund out of the general fund.

This year, the district has just under 1,200 students for this fund.

On Wednesday, the board held and approved a truth in taxation hearing as well as the 2025 L-4029 tax request.

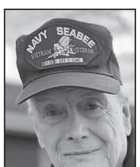
Josh Conrad was given the Rotary Educator of the Year award during the meeting.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

OBITUARIES

Thomas Nicholas Olson

Oct. 13, 1943 – May 8, 2026



Thomas Nicholas Olson, beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, veteran and friend, passed away peacefully on May 8, 2026, at the age of 82, surrounded by the love of his family.

Born on Oct. 13, 1943, in South Haven, Mich., Thomas lived a life rooted in honor, strength, kindness and deep devotion to those he loved.

A proud Vietnam veteran, he honorably served in the United States Navy, carrying with him throughout his life the values of loyalty, sacrifice, and service. He was deeply proud of his time serving his country, but those who knew him best understood that his greatest pride was always his family.

Thomas shared 55 beautiful years of marriage with the love of his life, Susan. Together they built a life filled with unwavering love, laughter, resilience and cherished memories. Their marriage was a true partnership and an example of enduring love to everyone fortunate enough to witness it.

Thomas is survived by his devoted wife, Susan; his loving children, Lori (Michael) Nemeth, Victoria (Peter) Ruf, Carrie Olson, and Robyn (Kyle) Henrickson; his cherished grandchildren, Taylor (Matthew) Mitchell, Adrianna Nemeth (Ian Epkey), Alexander Nemeth, Aiden Ruf, Jackson Mlodzinski, Drake Henrickson, and Sloan Henrickson; his precious great-granddaughter, Emmersyn Mitchell; and his faithful canine companion Raven. He also leaves behind many extended family members and dear friends whose lives were made brighter by knowing him.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Maurice and Ann Olson; his brothers, Alan Olson and Maurice "Babe" Olson; and his sister, Carolyn Fitzgerald.

To his children, Thomas was more than a father – he was a protector, a teacher, a source of comfort, and the steady foundation they could always rely on. His wisdom, patience and unconditional love shaped the lives of his daughters and will continue to guide them forever. He had a quiet strength that made people feel safe, heard and deeply cared for.

Thomas will be remembered for his warm smile, gentle heart, quick sense of humor and his ability to make everyone feel like family. He was the kind of man who showed his love through both words and actions – always willing to lend a hand, offer advice, share a story, or simply sit beside someone who needed company. His presence brought comfort, laughter and love wherever he went.

He found happiness in woodworking, leather crafting and traveling; taking pride in creating things with his hands and making memories with the people he loved most. Above all else, he treasured every moment spent with his family – whether gathered around the table, celebrating milestones, or enjoying the simple gift of being together.

A graveside service to honor and celebrate Thomas's life will be held at 11 a.m. on June 16 at Lake View cemetery, with military honors to recognize his faithful service to his country. Pastor Dan Maske will officiate.

Though our hearts are broken by his loss, we are forever grateful for the love he gave, the lessons he taught, and the beautiful memories he leaves behind. Thomas's legacy lives on in the family he adored and in every life he touched with his kindness, strength, and love.

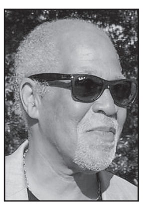
The family requests that memorial contributions be made to Wings of Hope Hospice or a local veterans charity in lieu of flowers.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence please visit www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

Clemuel 'Kim' Dobbins, II

Feb. 19, 1955 – June 6, 2026



Clemuel Wright Dobbins, II, better known as "Kim", 71, of South Haven, Mich. passed away peacefully on Saturday, June 6 at Caretel Inns of Saint Joseph. He was born Feb. 19, 1955 in Meadville, Pa. to Clemuel W. Dobbins, I and Patricia (Jackson) Dobbins.

Loved by all who knew him, this guy took hours to cut a small front yard because he stopped and talked to anyone who walked by. He made us all laugh with his unique sense of humor and never passed up an opportunity to brag about his children.

Clemuel will be missed by his life partner, Cindy Moreen; his children, Bryce Dobbins, and Breanne Dobbins; his siblings, Scott Dobbins, and Tracy (Jonathan) Snedeker; and many nieces and nephews.

He is preceded in death by his parents.

Memorial contributions may be given in Kim's name to the Al-Van Humane Society at www.al-van.org.

Arrangement entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel, South Haven 269-637-0333.

NEWSPAPERS

From page A1

local journalism, regardless of platform or ownership structure, benefits communities and democracy. But we also need to recognize reality: most of the original local reporting in this country is still being produced by newspapers.

If foundations, civic leaders and philanthropists truly care about preserving local news, they cannot focus exclusively on building new organizations while ignoring the institutions that are doing most of the work.

If you want to save local journalism in America, start by supporting your local newspaper.

Signed by America's Newspapers board of directors:

Patrick Dorsey, publisher, Santa Fe New Mexican

Alan Fisco, president and CEO, The Seattle Times

Jeremy Gulban, CEO, CherryRoad Technologies

PJ Browning, CEO, Evening Post Publishing, president and publisher, The Post & Courier

Bradley Waters, owner and president, Sentinel Media Co.

Leonard Woolsey, president, Southern Newspapers

Otis A. Brumby III, president and publisher, Times Journal Media

Kevin Craig, CEO, PAGE Cooperative

John DeAugustine, president and owner, Gazette News Group

Michael Fishman, president, Lakeway Publishers Inc.

Eliza Gaines, publisher, WEHCO Media

Kevin Hall, president and publisher, Georges Media

David Holgate, group president, PMG Community Newsgroup, LLC

Brian Jarvis, Esq. LL.M., president, WV News

Joyce McCullough, former president, Miller Group Media

Ted McGrew, VP, Newspapers Segment, Eastman Kodak Company

Nick Monico, COO, Adams MultiMedia

Camille Olson, partner, Seyfarth Shaw LLP

Jamie Paxton, president and CEO, Paxton Media Group

Tim Prince, president and CEO, Carpenter Media Group

Christopher P. Reen, president and CEO, Clarity Media Group

Zachary Richner, founder and managing partner, Arrandale Ventures

John Rung, president and CEO, Shaw Media

Bala Sundaramoothy, president and chief operating officer, Tampa Bay Times

Jason Taylor, chief revenue officer, USA Today Co.

Francis Wick, vice president and board member, Wick Communications

Cameron Nutting Williams, CEO, Ogden Newspapers

Marc Wilson, chairman emeritus, TownNews.com

Dean Ridings, president and CEO, America's Newspapers

America's Newspapers is an organization committed to explaining, defending and advancing the vital role of newspapers in democracy and civil life. The organization puts an emphasis on educating the public on all the ways newspapers contribute to building a community identity and the role they play in the social and economic fabric of communities across the country. Learn more at newspapers.org.

The Spotlight

A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

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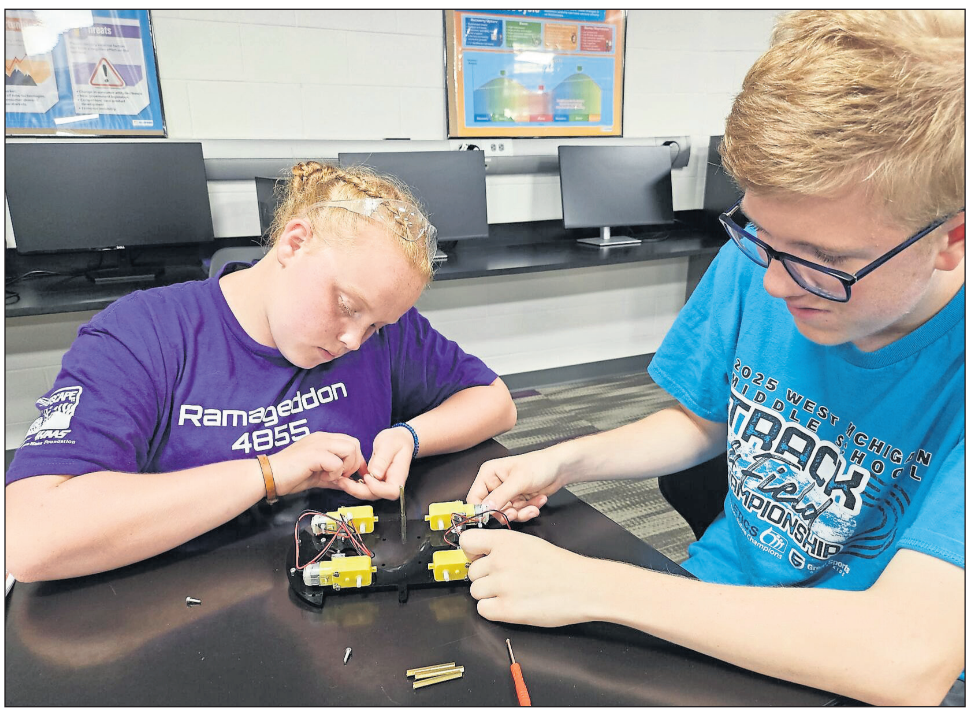
Floyd Decker, Manager

If interested in including your business here contact freid@thehp.com

Photos provided

South Haven High School's robotics team, Team 4855 Ramageddon, will host its annual Robotics Summer Skills Camp in June and July.



The South Haven High School Robotics Summer Skills Camp is open to middle school and high school students interested in hands-on learning opportunities in science, technology, engineering, arts and math.

SH high school's robotics team hosts summer camp

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven High School's robotics team, Team 4855 Ramageddon, will host its annual Robotics Summer Skills Camp in June and July.

According to a news release, the free camp is open to middle school and high school students interested in hands-on learning opportunities in science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM).

"Participants may choose to focus on robotics design and manufacturing, robotics programming, or business and marketing," the release stated. "Students who are new to robotics may explore multiple areas throughout the camp."

Camp sessions will be held from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

The camp session dates include:

■ Week One: June 24, 25 and 26.

■ Week Two: July 6, 7, 8 and 9.

"Each session begins with a fun and challenging team building activity before students break into groups to learn about shop tools and equipment, Java programming, computer-aided design, videography, graphic design, social media and other robotics-related skills," the release stated.

Pre-registration is required and may be completed at www.ramageddon.com.

For more information, contact Kim Wise at kwise@shps.org.

Photo provided / Tom Renner

The South Haven Farm Market officially returned to the newly renovated Huron Street Pavilion.

South Haven Farm Market reopens at Huron Street Pavilion

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven recently announced that the South Haven Farm Market officially returned to the Huron Street Pavilion, located at 539 Phoenix Street, on Wednesday.

According to a news release, the enhanced pavilion area features improved pedestrian walkways and upgraded electrical infrastructure.

"This long-awaited move marks an exciting new chapter for the market," the release stated.

The new improvements provide residents and visitors with a weather-protected, ADA-compliant venue to shop for fresh produce, artisanal products and handcrafted goods.

"The return to the Huron Street Pavilion reinforces the market's role as a cherished destination for local shopping, community connection and seasonal enjoyment," the release stated.

For more information about the 2026 South Haven Farm Market hours of operation, go to www.southhavenfarmmarket.com.

LMC to host home garden classes

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — To help home garden growers understand and address the many challenges of a vegetable garden, Lake Michigan College is hosting summer gardening classes as part of its Extended Education Program.

According to a news release, the hoop house at the college's South Haven campus, located at 125 Veterans Boulevard, will serve as the location for the three sessions from 5:30 to 7 p.m. on June 25, July 16 and Aug. 6.

"Anyone who has raised a vegetable garden has experienced at least some of the obstacles that stand in the way of a successful harvest," the release stated.

Cheyenne Sloan, an expert educator with the Michigan State University Extension, will lead the classes, showing participants how to diagnose and treat pest, disease, weed and nutrient issues across a diverse hoop house garden of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash, melons, herbs and greens.

The content of each session will be different to coincide with emerging issues as the growing season progresses.

"The sessions are appropriate for beginners as well as those with more gardening experience," the release stated. "Participants are encouraged to bring photos and questions for real-world troubleshooting."

Sessions are $15 each.

Participants can register online for one or more classes at:

■ June 25 – gardenscoutingjune.eventbrite.com

■ July 16 – gardenscoutingjuly.eventbrite.com

■ Aug. 6 – gardenscoutingaugust.eventbrite.com

For questions regarding the series, email tgodfrey@lakemichigancollege.edu.

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The South Haven Tribune makes every effort to ensure accuracy in its stories. If you believe there is an error, please contact the editor of the page on which it occurred. If you are unsure who to contact, call 269-637-1104 to be directed to the appropriate editor.

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Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pets of the Week, Benjamin!

Benjamin is a 4-year-old Alaskan Malamute mix with a heart as big as his fluffy frame. This sweet boy is affectionate, gentle, and quite possibly the undisputed king of belly rubs. Benjamin is currently undergoing heartworm treatment and would love to find a foster or foster-to-adopt home where he can relax, recover, and enjoy the comforts of home while he finishes treatment. If you're looking for a gentle companion who believes every day should include belly rubs, Benjamin is ready to meet you. Submit an adoption or foster survey at al-van.org/adopt.

Dig for Diamonds

Join us Saturday, June 20th, during Harbor Fest for Dig for Diamonds! Come see us at Johnny's Lakeshore Jewelry in Downtown South Haven from 11am–4pm. A scoop of sand is only $5, and you can sift to see if you found treasure! You'll also be able to give some love to one of our sweet shelter pups. A big thank you to Johnny's for sponsoring this annual event. All proceeds benefit your local shelter animals at Al-Van Humane Society.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST

Non-Clumping Clay Cat Litter, Paper Towels, Medium/Large Latex Gloves, Laundry Detergent

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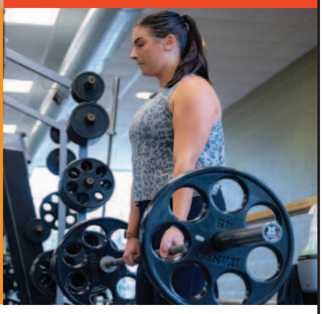

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South Haven Tribune CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

0100 ANNOUNCEMENTS

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0200 EMPLOYMENT

The City of South Haven is seeking a **Technical Support Administrator** to provide help desk support and assist with maintaining municipal IT systems, networks, and servers. Associate's degree in IT, Computer Science, or related field required (Bachelor's preferred), with 1–3 years of relevant experience. Municipal or enterprise IT experience preferred.
Candidates may apply online at www.southhavenmi.gov. The City of South Haven is an Equal Opportunity Employer who places a high value on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

0500 MERCHANDISE

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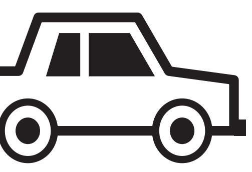

In The Classifieds!

0900 LEGALS

Bangor Public Schools
NOTICE OF A PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED 2026-2027 BUDGET

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on **June 23, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.**, at **Bangor High School-Room #13**, Bangor, Michigan, the Board of Education of **Bangor Public School District** will hold a public hearing to consider the District's proposed 2026-2027 budget.

Pursuant to Michigan law, a public hearing is required prior to the adoption of the proposed 2026-2027 budget. In addition, the annual budget must be adopted prior to July 1. The Board shall hear public comment on the proposed budget and tax millage rate during this hearing.

The proposed 2026-2027 budget including the proposed property tax millage rate, the estimated amount of money to be raised by taxation, and purposes for which millage will be levied, will be available for public inspection during normal business hours at **Bangor Public Schools- 801 W. Arlington, Bangor, MI 49013 www.bangorvikings.org.**

The property tax millage rate proposed to be levied to support the proposed budget will be a subject of this hearing.
This notice is given by order of the Board of Education.

Imelda Aparicio, Secretary

SOUTH HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS NOTICE OF A PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED 2026-2027 BUDGET

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on June 24, 2026, at 6:00 o'clock p.m., in the South Haven High School ILC, 600 Elkenburg St., South Haven, Michigan, the Board of Education of South Haven Public Schools will hold a public hearing to consider the District's proposed 2026-2027 budget.
The Board may not adopt its proposed 2026-2027 budget until after a public hearing. A copy of the proposed 2026-2027 budget, including the proposed property tax millage rate, is available for public inspection during normal business hours at 554 Green St., South Haven, Michigan beginning June 22, 2026.

The property tax millage rate proposed to be levied to support the proposed budget will be a subject of this hearing.
This notice is given by order of the Board of Education.

S. Grassflower, Secretary

NOTICE OF INTENT TO REQUEST RELEASE OF FUNDS FOR TIERED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

6/14/26
City of South Haven
539 Phoenix Street
South Haven, MI 49090
(269)637-0700

On or about June 23, 2026, the City of South Haven will request the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) to release CDBG funds under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended.

Program funds will be used to undertake a project known as Five-Year Environmental Review for MSHDA CDBG-Funded Homeowner Rehabilitation for the purpose of providing units of local government with funds to provide homeowners, South Haven, earning at or below 80% of the area median income with assistance for essential home repairs. The Homeowner Rehabilitation program aims to improve quality of life for local residents by funding essential home repairs for properties occupied by households earning at or below 80% of the area median income. All repairs must: be eligible under CDBG guidelines as defined in the MSHDA CDBG Policy Manual; comply with local building codes; and meet the MSHDA Housing Rehabilitation Standards. The maximum allowance per household is up to $40,000. The program will service single family homes within the City of South Haven. The length of time covered by this review is 5 years from release date for the grant numbers and fiscal years: B-23-DC-26-0001; B-24-DC-26-0001; B-25-DC-26-0001; B-26-DC-26-0001; B-27-DC-26-0001 NDD-2023-956-CBD The activities proposed are categorically excluded under HUD regulations at 24 CFR Part 58 from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements.
Estimated Total Program Cost: $328,000

The Tier I broad assessment of the project area revealed no serious environmental adverse impacts for: Endangered Species and Historic Preservation, THPO; Airport Hazards; Coastal Barrier Resources; Clean Air Act; Explosive & Flam. Operations; Farmlands Protection; Wetlands Protection; Wild and Scenic Rivers; and Environmental Justice.

Tier II site-specific environmental analyses will be conducted as project sites are identified and will include the following factors: Flood Insurance; Coastal Zone Management; Contamination and Toxic Substances; Floodplain Management; Historic Preservation, SHPO; Noise Abatement and Control.

An Environmental Review Record (ERR) that documents the environmental determinations for this project is on file at South Haven City Hall – 539 Phoenix St., South Haven, MI 49090. The record is available for review and may be examined or copied weekdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Any individual, group, or agency may submit written comments on the ERR to City of South Haven – 539 Phoenix St, South Haven, MI 49090. All comments received by June 22, 2026, will be considered prior to requesting a release of funds.

ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATION

The City of South Haven certifies to MSHDA that South Haven and Michael Landis in his/her capacity as Assistant City Manager and Certifying Officer, consents to accept the jurisdiction of the Federal Courts if an action is brought to enforce responsibilities in relation to the environmental review process and that these responsibilities have been satisfied. MSHDA's approval of the certification satisfies its responsibilities under NEPA and related laws and authorities and allows South Haven to use HUD Program funds.

OBJECTIONS TO RELEASE OF FUNDS

MSHDA will accept objections to its release of funds and the Grantee's certification for a period of fifteen days following the anticipated submission date or its actual receipt of the request (whichever is later) only if they are on one of the following bases: (a) the certification was not executed by the Certifying Officer of the Grantee; (b) the Certifying Officer has omitted a step or failed to make a decision or finding required by HUD regulations at 24 CFR Part 58; (c) the grant recipient or other participants in the development process has committed funds or incurred costs not authorized by 24 CFR Part 58 before approval of a release of funds by MSHDA; or (d) another Federal agency acting pursuant to 40 CFR Part 1504 has submitted a written finding that the project is unsatisfactory from the standpoint of environmental quality. Objections must be prepared and submitted in accordance with the required procedures (24 CFR Part 58, Sec. 58.76) and can be sent via email to mshda-cdbg@michigan.gov or through the mail, addressed to MSHDA - CDBG, 735 East Michigan Avenue, Lansing, MI 48912. Potential objectors should contact MSHDA to verify the actual last day of the objection period.

Michael Landis, Certifying Officer
City of South Haven

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Covert Township Special Board Meeting held May 27, 2026 at 6:00pm
Covert Township Hall, 73943 E. Lake St., Covert, MI 49043
Call to order/Pledge of Allegiance
Roll call: Rose, Pritchard, Cook, Taylor, Rendell
Public Comment: none
Motions approved:
*Stryker EMS+84 lease agreement
*projects #497.3001 and #497.3088 from VBC Road Commission
*Keeping the current escrow fee schedule
*Resolution increasing sewer rates
*Increase in FOIA/Administrator wage
*Resolutions establishing salaries/wages for Supervisor, Clerk, and Treasurer
*Resolution establishing the per meeting compensation for Trustees
Public Comment: none
Adjourned at 8:52pm
Next Regular Township Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday June 9, 2026, at 6:00 PM at the Covert Township Hall, 73943 Lake Street.
Respectfully submitted by Wednesday Pritchard, Covert Twp Clerk

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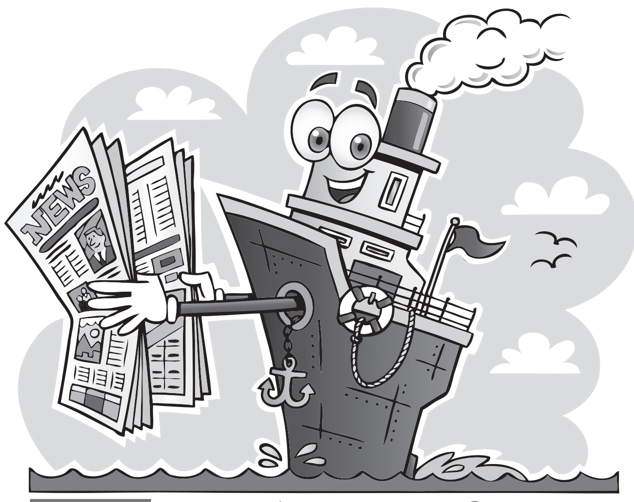

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Classifieds Make A Cash Connection!

Fire breaks out at South Haven business

Haven Heating and Cooling fire contained to attic

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — A fire at a South Haven business Wednesday night was one of eight alarms answered by South Haven Area Emergency Services in a two-hour period.

According to a news release from SHAES, the most serious of the calls was a fire at Haven Heating and Cooling on M-140 in South Haven Township.

"SHAES responded to a report of a transformer explosion, which was immediately changed to a structure fire," the release stated. "Firefighters arrived to find a tree on top of the commercial building and heavy smoke pouring out the eaves."

The fire was confined to the attic of the building.

Photo provided / Tom Renner

South Haven Area Emergency Services responded to a structure fire at Haven Heating and Cooling where a tree had fallen on top of the building.

Mutual aid brought Covert Township Fire Department to the scene. South Haven Police Department and South Haven Board of Public Works also responded.

The business was not open at the time and no injuries were reported to firefighters.

All of the alarms were related to high winds that had toppled various trees. Other storm-related reports continued to be called-in through the night.

South Haven students receive local scholarships

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — $68,000 worth of local scholarships were recently presented to South Haven High School seniors at Senior Awards night.

According to a news release, up to 24 scholarships students applied for through a single online application process were also included in the presentation.

The scholarships came from local endowments, businesses, organizations and individuals from around the community. The application process is sponsored by the South Haven Area Community Foundation in conjunction with South Haven Public Schools.

Five of the 24 scholarships are endowed scholarships held by the South Haven Area Community Foundation. Those endowments announced scholarships totaling $39,600. Endowed scholarships include funds held by the Grace Calvin Scholarship fund, the Community Memorial Scholarship, The Richard and Mary Barden Scholarship, the Jensen Family Scholarship and the Mark Hosley STEM Scholarship. 40 students received scholarships from these endowments this year.

"The South Haven Area Community Foundation is proud to provide support for the young people in our community and partner with the following organizations and individuals to present these local scholarships and to provide a single application system that allows students to apply for multiple scholarships in just one step," the release stated.

Supporting organizations and individuals included: South Haven Rotary Club, South Haven Kiwanis Club, Caleb Grimes Law Office, Dana Getman Memorial Scholarship, Faith in Process Foundation, Filbrandt Family, Mayor's Scholarship, Tri-M Music Scholarship and the family of Devon Smiley.

To learn more about the South Haven Area Community Foundation, go to southhavencf.org.

Photo provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed the AAUW of South Haven as a new chamber member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

AAUW of SH joins chamber of commerce

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed the AAUW of South Haven as a new chamber member.

According to a news release, the chamber held a ribbon cutting ceremony to welcome AAUW of South Haven.

Today, the South Haven branch is the third largest AAUW branch in Michigan, with 142 members dedicated to supporting education, community service and lifelong learning.

"Since the late 1990s, the organization has focused on providing scholarships to South Haven women graduates (and) helping local students pursue higher education opportunities," the release stated.

Scholarship funding is made possible through popular annual events, including the AAUW Book Sale and the Spring Fundraiser held at Cogdal Vineyards.

Beyond scholarships, AAUW of South Haven actively serves the community through a variety of initiatives.

Members participate in programs including: Blessings in a Backpack and Open Door dinners, stock essential items for students through the Lake Michigan College Pantry and organize annual bedding drives benefiting Sylvia's Place.

The organization also promotes civic engagement through candidate forums for local, state, federal and school board elections.

"In addition to its service and advocacy efforts, AAUW of South Haven offers opportunities for connection and friendship through book clubs, special interest groups, golf outings, card groups, and monthly luncheon gatherings held throughout the year," the release stated.

As the organization looks ahead, AAUW of South Haven is currently planning an 80th Anniversary celebration next spring, which will be open to the public.

"The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce is pleased to welcome AAUW of South Haven to its membership and recognizes the organization's longstanding commitment to education, community involvement and empowering women of all ages," the release stated.

South Haven welcomes Kruger Comics

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Kruger Comics as a new member.

According to a news release, the chamber held a ribbon cutting ceremony at their store located at 1210 Phoenix St. #6.

Kruger Comics is a locally owned comic book and gaming store offering a wide selection of new and vintage comic books, graphic novels, collectibles, trading card games, tabletop games and role playing games.

Photo provided

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed Kruger Comics as a new member with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

"The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce is pleased to welcome Kruger Comics to its membership and recognizes the business's contribution to the local retail community and growing gaming culture in the South Haven area," the release stated.

The shop serves comic enthusiasts, collectors and gamers from across Southwest Michigan and beyond.

"Community members are encouraged to visit Kruger Comics to explore its extensive selection of comics, games and collectibles and learn more about upcoming events and activities," the release stated.

For more information and to view their full lineup of events, go to krugercomics.com.

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SH emergency services receive $10,000 donation

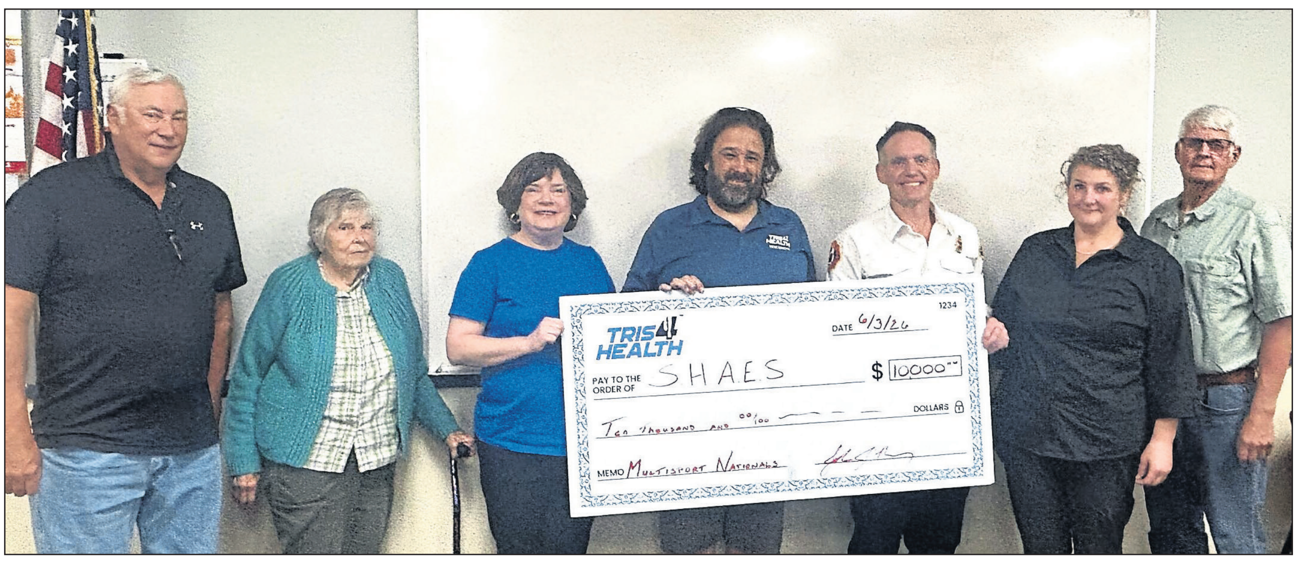
By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven Area Emergency Services recently accepted a give-back donation of $10,000 from Tris4health

According to a news release, the donation was for emergency services' support of the USAT Multisport National Championships Festival which was held in May at Lake Arvesta.

"This generous donation helps us invest in our people, our preparedness, and our community by supporting firefighter wellness, training, equipment and other initiatives that strengthen our ability to serve," Executive Director Brandon Hinz said in the release.

Participating in the festival were over 900 athletes from 47 States, the District of Columbia and four countries including: USA, Canada, Mexico and Macedonia. Emergency services provided safety support over the four-day event.



John Mosey of Tris4health presented a $10,000 donation to members of the South Haven Area Emergency Services board.
Photo provided / Tom Renner

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9 to 10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for students grades 6 through 12 every Monday from 3 to 5 p.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: May 1 through 31 "Deep In the Branches" (by 2026 Bailey Fall Conference Keynote Speaker Danae Wolfe) StoryWalk

South Haven Farmers Market: Open from 8 a.m. to 2pm on Saturdays, from May to October; and on Wednesdays from June through August.

South Haven Center for the Arts: National juried exhibition with the Arts and Aging Partnership of Southwest Michigan on display from June 20 to Aug. 1.

South Haven Memorial Library: Kids story time and yoga class at 10 a.m. on Mondays starting June 15.

June

12-14 – Michigan Flywheelers Museum: Swap Meet and Flee Market.

12-14 – Gingerman Raceway: Gridlife Midwest Festival.

13 – South Haven Memorial Library: Storytime at 11 a.m.

15 – South Haven Memorial Library: Kids Bingo at 5 p.m.

15-19 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Bailey's Budding Naturalists week one. Online registration is open. Campers can register for one or both weeks.

16 – Scott Club: Annual Membership Meeting and Luncheon at Senior Services, 08337 M-140, South Haven. No Zoom. RSVP is required via email at info@scottclub.org.

17 – South Haven Memorial Library: Summer Reading Program kick off. Participants can come in at their convenience and sew your own dino chicken nugget.

19 – South Haven Memorial Library: Learn about essential water safety tips

20 – South Haven Theatre Series: "Michiganderish" written and performed by Julie Ganey at 7:30 p.m. at Listiak Auditorium. Tickets cost $15 with free admission for students.

20 – South Haven Center for the Arts: opening reception for exhibitions "Care" and "Window to our World" from 2 to 4 p.m.

22 – Lake Michigan College: free screening of "Old Heart" at 6:30 p.m. hosted by the First Hebrew Congregation of South Haven, Lily of the Valley Church in Covert and Temple B'nai Shalom in St. Joseph.

22 – South Haven Memorial Library: Moa the Dino Bird at 11 a.m. Meet Moa, the giant bird that once roamed New Zealand. Artist Megan Bennett brings this fascinating prehistoric creature to life through art and story telling.

22-26 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Bailey's Budding Naturalists week two. Online registration is open. Campers can register for one or both weeks.

23 – South Haven Memorial Library: Rock Painting at 11 a.m. Decorate and arrange rocks to create a prehistoric rock garden for the library and a few to take home.

24 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

24-26 – South Haven High School Robotics: Robotics summer skills camp from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Registration is required.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Storytime at 11 a.m. Attendees can also make a dinosaur keychain.

26 – South Haven Performance Series: The Lincoln Trio to perform at 7 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, 429 Michigan Ave. Admission is $15 and free for students.

25 – Lake Michigan College: Session one of summer gardening classes from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Sessions are $15 each.

26 – South Haven Memorial Library: free movie screening of The Land Before Time at 2 p.m.

27 – First Hebrew Congregation of South Haven: Tot Shabbat at the South Haven Memorial Library from 5 to 6 p.m..

27 – Scott Club: 29th Annual Cottage Walk from noon to 5 p.m. Tickets are $20 per person.

29 – South Haven Memorial Library: Kids Bingo at 5 p.m.

30 – South Haven Memorial Library: Preschool Storytime at 11 a.m.

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South Haven Theatre Series

Michiganderish
Written and Performed by Julie Ganey
June 20, 2026
7:30 p.m.
When Julie and her husband find a nice spot to get away and relax, what they find is Pure Michigan–from unruly chipmunks and menacing deer to errant chainsaws and fervent eco-advocates. But most unexpected is the couple's discovery of the difference between visiting and living in an area. Laugh with them as they realize what it takes to belong to a community.
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What it's like to be sued over medical debt

By KATY GOLVALA, JENNA CARLESSO
CT Mirror
and NOAM N. LEVEY
KFF Health News (TNS)

Photos by Shahrzad Rasekh / CT Mirror / TNS

Christine Wood at home in Terryville, Connecticut, on March 3. She was sued by Bristol Hospital over an unexpected $12,000 bill related to her weight loss surgery.

When Christine Wood received a $12,000 bill from Bristol Hospital, she thought it must be a mistake. It was more than she and her husband made in a month combined.

"I'm freaking out," said Wood, who lives in a 1,700-square-foot home in Terryville, a village just outside Bristol, Connecticut. "I don't understand it."

Wood, 52, had weight loss surgery at Bristol Hospital in 2022, hoping it would help with her sleep apnea and the pain in her knees and back. Before scheduling the procedure, she checked with her insurer, she said, and was told the surgery would cost $5,000 out-of-pocket. She paid in advance.

More than six months later, Bristol sent Wood another bill that pushed the cost of her surgery to more than $17,000. Wood said she tried to dispute the charge. The hospital sued her.

"That's ridiculous. I was told so many times by Aetna: '$5,000 out-of-pocket,'" Wood said. "I never would have had the surgery had I known it was going to cost almost 20 grand."

Wood is among more than three dozen Connecticut patients the Connecticut Mirror and KFF Health News interviewed over the past year who were sued by their hospital or physician over unpaid bills.

The patients include teachers, small-business owners, a postal worker, a retired nursing home aide, a nurse, and a hotel bellhop. Most had jobs and health insurance. Nearly all said they wanted to pay what they owed.

Patients taken to court described baffling bills, confusing health plan rules, and frustrating and fruitless telephone calls to hospital billing offices and health insurers' customer-service lines. Even when they tried to resolve their outstanding bills, many said they couldn't get answers.

Their experiences encapsulate breakdowns in the healthcare system that trap patients in debt. Health insurance often didn't cover care for reasons they couldn't understand. Several patients did not qualify for financial assistance from providers, despite modest incomes. If they committed to pay, patients were hit with liens on their homes or interest payments and court fees that piled new debt onto their medical bills.

The industry's key players blame one another for a broken system. Providers say insurers' high-deductible plans saddle patients with massive bills even when they have coverage. Insurers say hospitals raise prices at rates that outpace inflation.

Meanwhile, patients are stuck with the fallout. In 2022, about 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. reported carrying medical or dental debt.

"It's bad enough that I have bad health and have to pay mountains of medical bills," said Samantha Mantiera, whom Danbury Hospital sued in 2024 over $10,000 she said she was erroneously charged. "Then to constantly be dealing with incorrect bills and then a lawsuit on top of it took me over the top."

Mantiera said she spent months trying to explain to the hospital and then a collection agency that her insurance statements indicated she owed just $260. She was sued anyway.

After Mantiera contested the lawsuit, Danbury Hospital withdrew it, court records show.

Mantiera said she and her husband now travel up to an hour from their Brookfield, Connecticut, home to avoid hospitals owned by Danbury's parent company, now called Northwell Health.

Kathy Holt, who leads the state Office of the Healthcare Advocate, said that in the past several decades healthcare has only gotten harder for patients to navigate. The agency fields thousands of calls every year from residents looking for help with medical billing questions.

"I've talked to too many people who have just given up," Holt said. "The system has been made so hard for them, and I feel like it's deliberate."

'They would not talk to me'

Debt collection lawsuits against patients have declined in Connecti-

Bristol Hospital in Bristol, Connecticut, on March 3. It is part of Bristol Health, one of Connecticut's most financially strained health systems.

Danbury Hospital in Danbury, Connecticut, on Jan. 12. Last year, a judge dismissed one of its lawsuits against a patient over a $64,000 unpaid bill, citing the hospital's "failure to prosecute with reasonable diligence," according to court records.

This included lawsuits by Bristol Health, an independent local health system that includes Bristol Hospital, and Nuvance Health, a chain of seven hospitals recently acquired by Northwell Health, a multibillion-dollar system based in New York.

Nuvance hospitals filed over 4,000 collection lawsuits from 2019 to 2024, records show. Over the five years, the health system accounted for more than a quarter of the roughly 16,300 medical debt collection lawsuits against patients identified in state court records.

Hospital officials and other medical providers say they try to work with patients who have trouble paying their bills. Nikki Schulz, chief revenue officer for Northwell's Connecticut hospitals, said in a statement that years ago the system "eased" its collection practices, leading to a "precipitous decline" in medical debt referred to collections.

"We fundamentally retooled our approach to align with industry best practices," Schulz said. Records

it," Wood said. "They wanted their money."

Bristol spokesperson Albert Peguero also blamed Wood's insurer and said the hospital worked with Wood as she went through numerous insurance appeals with Aetna.

Wood didn't fare any better with Aetna. It turned out that her health plan covered only $15,000 worth of bariatric surgery, meaning she was responsible for any bills that exceeded that.

Aetna spokesperson Shelly Bandit said Wood had been notified of this provision, though Wood disputes this.

The back-and-forth with the hospital and the insurer enraged Wood. But after she was sued, she concluded she had no more options. She settled with Bristol, agreeing to pay the full balance on a payment plan of $150 a month, court records show. Under the agreement, it would take Wood almost seven years to pay off the debt.

Last year, Wood faced additional financial challenges after her

Eva Stahl, a vice president of Undue Medical Debt, a nonprofit that has worked with states to buy and retire debt – including for more than 150,000 Connecticut residents.

"Patients understandably are left with questions and confusion," Stahl said.

Timothy Bigham, who owns a construction company and was sued in 2023 by Danbury Hospital, said he never understood why he was billed more than $64,000 after he was hospitalized following a 2019 heart attack.

Bigham, who lives in Danbury, Connecticut, said he was insured at the time. But soon after he got home, Bigham began getting regular calls from the hospital. He was told his insurer wasn't paying the bill because he refused to "release medical records," he recalled.

"I had insurance when I had the heart attack, but it's my job to get the insurance company to pay?" Bigham said. "I'm self-employed. I work in construction. I don't have hours on end to sit on the phone trying to talk to somebody at an insurance company."

Bigham said he ultimately "stopped dealing with it" because he didn't know what else to do.

Then, in 2023, Danbury Hospital sued him. A judge dismissed the case in 2025, citing the hospital's "failure to prosecute with reasonable diligence," according to court records. But by then, the alleged debt had devastated Bigham's credit score, tanking it by over 100 points, he said.

Northwell's Schulz declined to comment on any specific patient cases, citing privacy laws.

Connecticut passed a law in 2024 barring medical debt from consumer credit reports.

A handful of states have tried to protect patients from lawsuits through measures including lim-

records show.

Jean Pierre said he tried twice to apply for financial assistance, but the hospital told him he and his wife made too much to qualify, even though his medical bills totaled almost a quarter of their annual income of about $87,000.

With nowhere to turn, Jean Pierre settled with Norwalk Hospital, now part of the Northwell system, in 2025, agreeing to pay the full bill in $100 monthly installments, records show. At that rate, he will be paying off the debt until 2042.

After the settlement, he said, the judge encouraged him to reach out to elected officials to try to get the debt canceled. Jean Pierre was exhausted.

"He says to me, 'You have to go to your senators. Go to the governor.' I said, 'That's too much. [I'm just going to] let it go.'"

Jean Pierre has left the Hilton and now works as a personal care attendant, as does his wife. But he said it still nags him that businesses and healthcare providers received millions of dollars in government aid during the pandemic, while he was left with $20,000 in medical debt.

"They gave money for the hotel. They gave money for the hospital. They gave money for a lot of stuff," he said. "But we don't see none."

'I'm not trying to run away'

Other patients said they felt trapped, even if they tried to do the right thing.

Deneen Brown, who runs a small daycare out of her home in Norwalk, was sued by Norwalk Hospital in 2024 for $7,200 over bills she allegedly incurred "on or about 2019 and 2020," according to the lawsuit.

Brown said she was stunned by the lawsuit, as she believed she'd had health insurance at the time. But as a small-business owner who took pride in maintaining good credit and staying on top of her finances, she said she committed to the lawsuit.

"I'm not trying to run away from something that may be my responsibility," Brown said. "If you say I owe it, I'm going to figure it out, and I'm going to pay it."

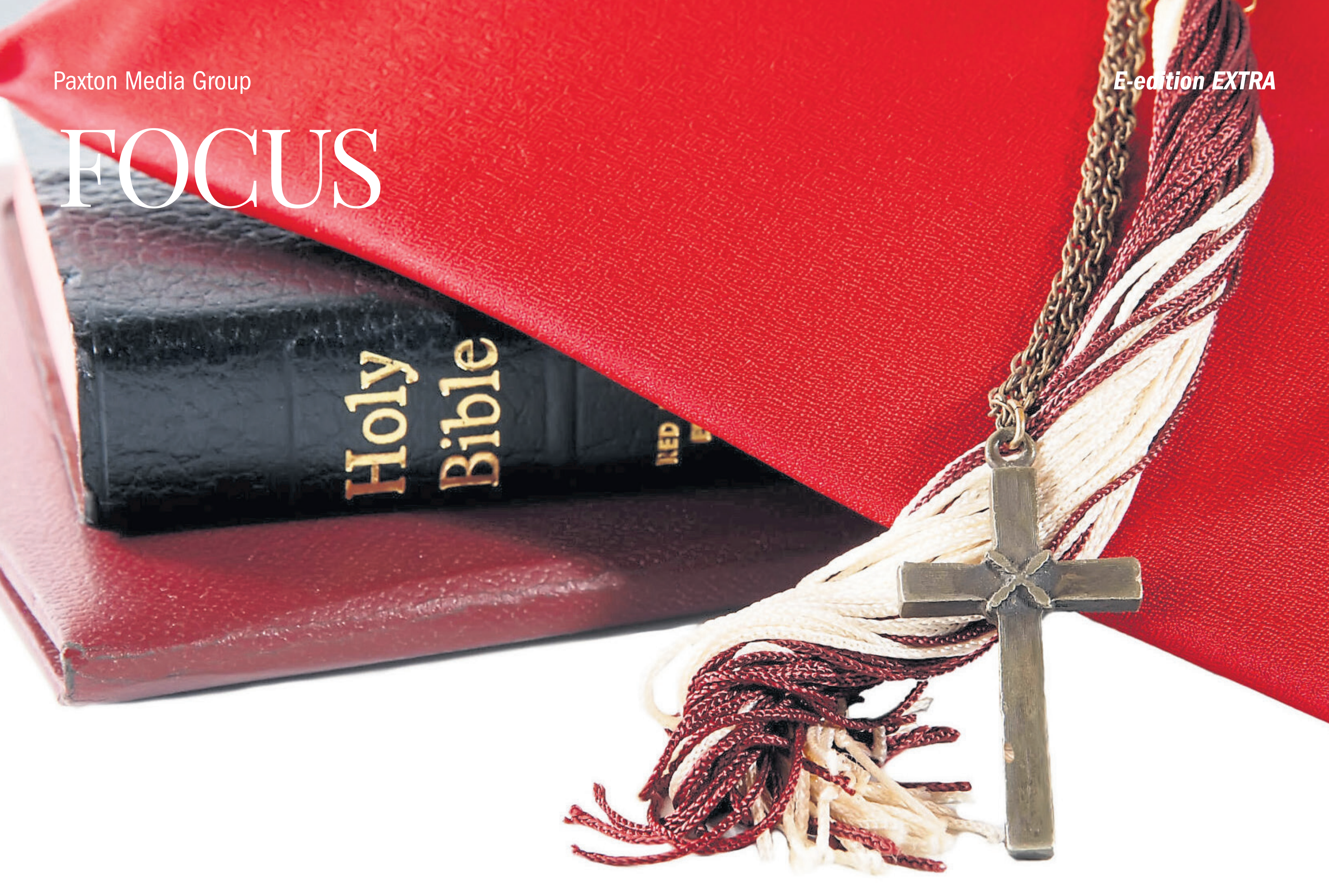
In January 2025, she agreed to a nearly 13-year payment plan of $50 a month, court records show. Often she pays more, she said.

The following month, the hospital placed a lien on her home. Brown said she never realized the hospital would continue to penalize her, even after she agreed to a payment plan.

"Had I known that, I would have never settled," she said.

This article was produced in partnership with The Connecticut Mirror, a statewide nonprofit newsroom that covers public policy and politics.

KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.



More megachurches want to be your alma mater

By ANNA CLAIRE VOLLERS
Stateline.org (TNS)

In the heart of the Bible Belt, a small United Methodist college graduated its final class in May 2024, shutting its doors after 168 years.

Birmingham-Southern College in Birmingham, Alabama, was a Christian private liberal arts school that counted among its graduates members of Congress, famous musicians, Pulitzer Prize winners and the former executive editor of The New York Times. Yet it had been unable to endure years of financial losses.

About 15 minutes southeast, toward the Birmingham suburbs, the inaugural freshman class at Highlands College was finishing its first year that same spring. The private Christian school, which has just gotten permission from the state to award bachelor's degrees, was born out of the nondenominational Church of the Highlands, the biggest religious congregation in the state and one of the largest in the nation. It claims a weekly attendance of 60,000 across more than two dozen campuses in Alabama and Georgia.

Long-established, religiously affiliated small colleges such as Birmingham-Southern are battling the same existential pressures weighing on nonreligious liberal arts colleges nationwide: declining enrollment, rising operational costs and a deepening skepticism of higher education among families who fear ideological influence on their children or question whether steep tuition and fees are worth it.

But a different model of Christian education is on the upswing: Some of the nation's biggest megachurches are getting into the college business, prioritizing job training and church culture over traditional liberal arts. A franchise-style model from a Christian university in Florida has made it easier than ever for them to launch.

The new schools are attracting big donors and growing their enrollment through a built-in base of believers – and some are pushing to access public funding.

States including Florida, Georgia and Minnesota have opened their state financial assistance programs to religious colleges in recent years. The change mirrors a broader push already underway in K-12 education, where states have funneled billions to religious schools.

Many of these new colleges eschew the regional accrediting that's standard for more established universities. Some pursue alternative accreditation from religious nonprofits that may or may not be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

That means students' college credits may not transfer to other schools or to graduate programs. And the costs of non-accredited coursework aren't eligible for federal financial assistance offered through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA.

Supporters of the megachurch-affiliated schools say they're a good option for students who want practical training for specific jobs, generally in ministry or business. They say students benefit from being closely connected to their local faith community.

But some experts question whether the schools' lack of traditional accreditation could limit students' options after graduation, or whether their close ties to one church could have an outsized impact on the school's accountability and transparency.

"Public funding is something that everybody should be concerned about, no matter your politics, no matter your religion," said Adam Laats, a professor of education and history at Binghamton University in upstate New York who has written ten books on the history of Christian education in America.

"And I think it's everyone's business if there are schools that are restricting the chances of students in a way that students aren't aware of what they're getting into."

Financial aid

Schools such as Highlands College are growing their physical footprints with big donations from heavy hitters. A $20 million donation from the Green family, whose patriarch David Green founded the Hobby Lobby craft store chain, funded Highlands' first two residence halls.

In March, 3-year-old Austin Christian University – born out of Texas-based Celebration Church, which has more than 23,000 members – broke ground on a $50 million complex thanks to a donation of the same size from Roger Bringmann, a vice president at California-based tech giant Nvidia.

The schools' focus more closely aligns with many conservatives' educational goals. Republicans in statehouses across the country have pushed to increase Christianity's influence and presence in education, while President Donald Trump's administration has proposed relaxing accreditation rules.

In Florida last month, Republican state Attorney General James Uthmeier declared the state won't enforce its constitutional ban on funding religious institutions, opening the door for state-funded scholarships for Christian colleges.

The newer Christian schools also may benefit from battles fought by their older counterparts.

Last year, Georgia agreed to allow religious colleges to participate in state-funded financial aid programs after a 64-year-old Christian college sued the state over its law that barred theological schools from public tuition assistance.

And after two century-old colleges filed suit in Minnesota last year, a federal judge struck down a 2023 state law that barred religious colleges from a state-funded dual enrollment program that lets high school students enroll in college credit courses tuition-free.

"We've done lobbying at the state level, working with the state legislators to get access to things like in-state, need-based grants," said Patrick Fitzgerald, a spokesperson for Southeastern University, which has partnered with more than 200 churches across the country to help them launch colleges. "Depending on the need in each state and the availability of state funding, we try to access every scholarship dollar that we can for students."

Many megachurch schools offer financial aid. But tuition and fees at more established church-affiliated schools can run into the mid-five figures – on par with their private college counterparts, but far above in-state tuition at big public universities.

At Highlands College, tuition, housing and fees total about $42,000 per year. The school, which focuses on training for the ministry, says 100 percent of its students receive scholarships. In-state tuition, housing and fees at the University of Alabama cost $28,196 per year. At Birmingham-Southern, the year it closed, those same costs totaled about $36,500.

But costs vary. At Elevation College, which plans to welcome its first class this fall and was launched by North Carolina megachurch Elevation Church, the tuition, housing and fees are about $19,936 per year. VOUS College of Ministry in Miami, based at one of the fastest-growing megachurches in Florida, charges $12,136 per year in tuition and fees, though that doesn't include housing.

Single-church affiliations

Unlike more traditional schools that are affiliated with an entire denomination, these newer schools are often deeply entwined with the leadership at just one megachurch.

At Austin Christian, for example, the college president is Connor Champion, the son of Celebration Church's founding pastors, Joe and Lori Champion.

Last year, Church of the Highlands founding pastor Chris Hodges stepped down from his role there to focus on being chancellor at Highlands College, and tapped the college's president to become the church's new head pastor.

Some critics say that when schools are closely tied to one church, rather than to an entire denomination, the church's leadership and finances have an outsized impact on the school.

"You can end up with this insular, sometimes authoritarian power structure, which I don't mean to say is unique to religious schools, but it is one of the hazards of this kind of institutional structure," said Laats.

But having a college tied to a local church also can boost its credibility and accountability within that faith community, said Rick Ostrander, a longtime Christian college administrator who is currently the executive director for the Michigan Christian Study Center at the University of Michigan.

"There's always the danger with new markets and new models that develop some bad actors or just some unhealthy situations," Ostrander said, "but I think that's less likely in this area than some other quote-unquote professional areas."

Church franchise models

The Highlands model – practical, church-based job training paired with academic courses offered through an accredited partner university – is spreading, in part, thanks to a franchise-style approach from a Florida university that has made launching a church-based college easier than ever.

Southeastern University in central Florida is a private school affiliated with Assemblies of God, one of the world's largest Pentecostal Christian denominations. Southeastern is accredited by a federally recognized regional accreditation body, and it's one of the fastest-growing private nonprofit colleges in the country, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

One reason for that growth is it has partnered with more than 200 churches, including some of the nation's largest, to offer accredited Southeastern degrees through local startup colleges. Some of these church colleges, such as Highlands, have hundreds of students; some just a handful. Southeastern provides the academics while the church provides the practicum classes.

About a third of the 13,600 students at Southeastern are at schools affiliated with their network partner churches, said Fitzgerald, who is chief of staff for Kent Ingle, the president of Southeastern.

The university helps the church colleges line up curriculum and instructors, he said, and helps secure the necessary state approvals.

"We make sure that their courses are up to accreditation standards," Fitzgerald said. "We make sure that the faculty they have are well-qualified, and we're able to provide a stamp of approval on pretty much what they're already doing, and so it's a match made in heaven, if you will."

By offering educational degrees, a church can create a pipeline of future staffers who are steeped in its culture, a priority for megachurches intent on preserving their brand.

And it gives churches additional workers who run conferences, staff events or manage social media, all for college credit rather than wages. That can be a boon for high-revenue megachurches that rely on an army of volunteers.

Fitzgerald said he's not aware that Southeastern has ever said no to a church that approached it about becoming a partner site. Revenue from student tuition and fees is split between Southeastern and the church college.

Coming changes

One of Southeastern University's biggest success stories has been Highlands College in Birmingham. The school began offering unaccredited ministry courses in 2011 before joining the Southeastern network in 2017.

In 2023, Highlands was awarded its own accreditation by the Association for Higher Education, a network of Christian schools that has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. It now offers more than half a dozen bachelor's degree programs.

This fall, the college will launch a new business school and a bachelor's degree in business leadership. The Dunn School of Business is named in honor of the former CEO of a faith-based investment group that has invested millions in a church-planting network co-founded by Chris Hodges, the chancellor of Highlands College.

In Texas, Austin Christian University is focused entirely on business education, offering a bachelor's of business administration degree through its partnership with Southeastern. Tuition, fees and housing are $35,000 per year. In addition to academic classes, students attend weekly sessions with Christian business executives and can work with Christian entrepreneurs on business projects in a "startup accelerator" program.

The business focus could help protect the school from coming changes at the federal level.

The Trump administration has been working to overhaul higher education, including proposing a new rule that would require undergraduate programs to show their graduates earn more than the median earnings of similarly aged adults with only a high school diploma, or risk losing access to federal student loans and grants.

Some Christian higher ed organizations, such as the Association for Biblical Higher Education and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, worry these provisions would have a disproportionately negative effect on Christian institutions, particularly those that train for traditionally lower-paying ministry or church roles.

Fitzgerald of Southeastern said he isn't concerned that the federal overhaul will harm the newest crop of church colleges.

"We believe that as students begin to really reevaluate the return on investment of higher education, we think that unique models for education like this one are the ones that are going to thrive and succeed," Fitzgerald said.

Stateline is part of States Newsroom, a national nonprofit news organization focused on state policy.

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Is my brain wired to never see a ghost?

A psychologist on three factors that make a paranormal experience more likely

By MELISSA MAFFEO
Teaching Professor of Psychology, Wake Forest University (The Conversation)

Around 1 in 5 Americans say they've seen a ghost. I'm not one of them, and I probably never will be. I blame my brain.

Let me explain. No one can say definitively that ghosts exist, but many people believe they do. Roughly three-quarters of Americans believe in some form of paranormal activity – not only ghosts, but psychic abilities, precognitive dreams, mediums and anything else that conventional explanations can't account for.

As a psychology professor, I often think about the subjectivity people use when interpreting experiences. I wonder, then, if there are perfectly ordinary explanations for seemingly extraordinary experiences. Maybe a perfect storm of everyday factors can converge and trigger the sensation of a paranormal experience.

In my new book, "Science of the Supernatural," I explore the idea that the human brain might be creating an experience of the supernatural by misinterpreting the external world. Here are three factors that might trick your brain into creating a fake ghost:

Haunted factor #1: Environmental stimuli

Anyone who's ever watched a ghost hunting show has seen the paranormal investigator mutter something like "The EMF's going crazy" when there's purported supernatural activity afoot. Electromagnetic fields, or EMFs, are invisible areas of energy created by electrically charged particles.

At present, there is no direct evidence that humans can consciously sense EMF the same way we can touch, see or hear things in our environment. But with a handheld device purchased at a local hardware store, you can measure them anywhere. An EMF detector picks up electrical or magnetic activity, whether human-made or otherworldly. But do EMF fluctuations relate to paranormal activity?

The scientific method might help answer this question. In one study, conducted in the South Street vaults underneath Edinburgh, Scotland, EMFs fluctuated more in areas with a history of ghostly happenings. Another study found greater variability of EMFs in the more "haunted" areas of Hampton Court Palace in England.

People might unknowingly be detecting changes in environmental stimuli, like electromagnetic fields. The question then becomes: Did the ghost cause the EMF, or did the EMF cause the ghost?

To date, only one research group has attempted to experimentally manipulate environmental factors, including complex EMF, and measure subsequent perceptions of the paranormal.

Participants did report many peculiarities, ranging from feeling dizzy to feeling like they were detached from their bodies and even sensing a presence – but these experiences didn't correspond to how the researchers varied environmental conditions, like EMF intensity. Interestingly, the people who described anomalous experiences were the same people who believed more strongly in the paranormal.

Do environmental factors like EMF lead to perceptions of the paranormal? On the one hand, there is a correlation between reportedly haunted places and EMF variability. And there are some indications that humans can detect magnetism. On the other hand, experimental manipulation of EMF did not relate to weird perceptions in a lab setting.

I think we need to look into other haunted factors.

Haunted factor #2: Neurological mix-ups

By applying a small electrical current to the side of the head, usually to evaluate a patient for a clinical procedure, researchers have observed some strange effects. One case study described a patient who experienced an "illusory shadow figure" that was mimicking, and even interfering, with their movements. Other people have reported out-of-body experiences.

Experimental evidence suggests that this brain area, the temporoparietal junction, is probably crucial for the feeling of embodiment – that you inhabit your own body. Disrupting this brain area seems to trigger a sensation of disembodiment.

Neuroscientists aren't completely sure how the sense of embodiment is built in the brain. The brain probably integrates bodily senses, like balance and position, with other internal processes, like a sense of self and agency. When this integration is altered, a person will experience very strange sensations.

Sometimes, misinterpretation of sensations from the body can happen during sleep, when your brain shuts out the external world. During rapid eye movement, or REM, sleep, when most vivid dreams occur, the brain sends messages that prevent movement of skeletal muscles. This inhibition causes complete paralysis during REM sleep. It is a neurological safeguard; without it, you would be likely to act out your dreams.

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Some people, though, wake up during REM sleep and find that they cannot move. They may simultaneously experience rich hallucinations – the remnants of their dream. This experience passes quickly. But in that moment of sleep paralysis, the neural signals that control skeletal muscle movement are inhibited, resulting in a mismatch of feedback from the body to the brain. Most people respond to the missing sensory information with fear, which makes them more likely to experience the sights and sounds from their dreams as reality.

Haunted factor #3: Personality traits

Living through a paranormal encounter requires that a person label their experience as such. If a believer were exposed to fluctuating EMFs, for example, they might be quick to categorize the strange sensation as paranormal. A skeptic might note they felt weird or off, but probably not point to a paranormal explanation.

There's a growing body of research that suggests people with certain personality traits are more likely to believe in the paranormal.

For instance, some people are hyperaware of unconscious perceptions and ideas, which then permeate their consciousness. Often, these traits are associated with magical thinking, distorted or unusual thoughts, disorganized behavior and, sometimes, trouble forming close relationships.

Psychologists refer to this set of traits as schizotypy. They're related to schizophrenia, although being high in schizotypy doesn't mean you will be diagnosed with the disorder of schizophrenia. People with high levels of schizotypy are more likely to believe in the paranormal. They're also more likely to experience disembodiment and spontaneous sensory perceptions and have trouble discriminating between self and others.

All of these traits relate to the function of the temporoparietal junction – the brain area that helps you know you're located within your own body.

When haunted factors add up to a ghost

While I cannot say for sure whether ghosts exist, I can propose a plausible explanation for why some people might be more prone to apparent paranormal experiences than others.

Consider a person who believes in paranormal phenomena who experiences a natural change in electromagnetic fields or an episode of sleep paralysis. Those experiences induce unusual sensations that this person cannot explain. Searching for meaning in ambiguity, this person distorts their distinction between internally and externally generated sensations. They settle on the only explanation that makes sense to them – that this strange feeling they experienced was a ghost.

My guess is that belief in the paranormal is the glue that holds the haunted factors together to create the (mis) perception of a ghost.

One experiment asked participants to walk through a disused theater in Decatur, Illinois. Some were told that the theater was haunted, and some were not. Several participants noted weird sensations that they attributed to paranormal activity – but only those who believed that the theater was haunted reported these sensations.

Belief alone might not create a ghost, but belief combined with at least one haunted factor – environmental stimuli, neurological hiccups or psychological conditions – might be enough to make a ghost real.

This becomes a chicken-or-the-egg riddle – or in this case, the ghost or the EMF. Someone who is more likely to be sensitive to environmental factors or who experiences sleep paralysis might create belief from their experiences. When someone cannot explain these experiences with any "natural" explanation, a supernatural explanation might be the only one that makes sense.

I've never noticed EMF. I've never experienced sleep paralysis. I'm pretty sure I don't have personality traits like schizotypy. I don't believe in the paranormal. And I don't think I'll ever see a ghost.

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FOCUS

THE CONVERSATION

Making sense of 'monoculture'

How 'monoculture' became a catchall for two opposing anxieties – that we no longer share enough, and that we all share too much

By MARIA A. RODAS
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
(The Conversation)

When "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" aired its final episode on May 21, critics lamented more than the end of a television program.

It was a nightly ritual that millions of Americans participated in, with Bloomberg media reporter Lucas Shaw describing its cancellation as one more sign of "the decline of monoculture."

Eulogies for "the monoculture" have appeared elsewhere. In fall 2025, BuzzFeed announced "the death of celebrity monoculture." The Ringer asked whether summer 2025 was the "summer without monoculture."

In all of these uses, the word describes a vanished era of shared cultural experience, a time when most people watched, listened to and talked about the same things.

But "monoculture" gets pulled in a different direction, too. Other writers, like cultural critic Kyle Chayka, have used it to describe the opposite problem: a sense that the culture today is becoming too uniform, too flattened, too much the same everywhere you look.

When the same word is used as a lens to view the world in different ways, something else is usually going on.

As a marketing professor who studies culture and consumer behavior, I find the current usage of "monoculture" telling. The word comes from agriculture, and tracing its journey from the farm to the algorithm reveals quite a bit about a tension many people are feeling right now: a craving for connection and community that coincides with a longing to stand out as unique.

From the farm to the feed

"Monoculture" began as an agricultural term in the early 20th century to describe planting a single crop across a large area of farmland. The practice was efficient and profitable, but it was also risky. Single-crop fields are more vulnerable to pests, disease and weather shocks. They also displace the smaller, scrappier ecosystems that once occupied the land.

The word migrated into cultural criticism in the 1980s and 1990s. Music writers like Robert Christgau and later Chuck Klosterman used it to describe a media landscape dominated by a handful of TV networks, magazines and record labels.

Much of the agricultural meaning came along for the ride. When people complain about "creeping monoculture" today, they're often referring to the way the algorithms, artificial intelligence and the economics of the attention economy have flattened popular culture the way industrial farming flattened the prairie.

For example, urban studies scholars have traced how independent coffee shops across North America have come to look strikingly alike, with the same exposed brick, vintage furniture and tattooed baristas.

"Whether it's popular fashion, architecture or interior design, idiosyncrasies are collapsing into a generic, hegemonic aesthetic," they write, and it's due, in part, to the way "social media algorithms promote the visuals that users are most likely to engage with."

Generative AI is starting to foment the same dynamic. A study published in January found that when generative systems are allowed to run on their own, they quickly converge on what researchers call "visual elevator music" – generic, familiar outputs that strip away quirks and kinks. The technology that promises infinite variety, it turns out, has a strong pull toward sameness.

The original problem with monoculture in farming is the same one people now see in culture: Efficiency at scale crowds out the small, the spontaneous and the strange.

What people are actually responding to

But there is another way the word gets used, and it points in a different direction.

Scott Kowalchyk / CBS Entertainment

Stephen Colbert on the set of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" in New York on May 6.

Matt Slocum / AP

Bad Bunny performs during halftime of the NFL Super Bowl 60 between the New England Patriots and the Seattle Seahawks on Feb. 8 in Santa Clara, Calif.

When people lament the death of monoculture, they are often missing the experience of belonging, of sharing references and emotional beats with millions of strangers. When they lament the rise of monoculture, they are often worrying about the cost of that belonging, the way being part of a mass audience can feel like a flattening of who you actually are.

People mourning the loss of monoculture are rarely mourning the loss of aesthetic diversity. They are mourning the experience of shared attention, the sense that a lot of people were oriented toward the same thing. When commentators eulogized "The Late Show" as the end of a nightly ritual, this is largely what they meant.

In 1983, the series finale of "M*A*S*H" was watched by an estimated 106 million Americans. Finales from other shows – "Cheers" in 1993, "Seinfeld" in 1998 and "Friends" in 2004 – were also watched by huge swaths of the public.

There's still the Super Bowl, which reliably pulls in 100 million-plus U.S. viewers. But in terms of weekly television and pop music releases, the shared cultural experience that once defined American life appears to have gone by the wayside.

So while some people worry that the culture is becoming too uniform, others worry that it is becoming too fragmented. "Monoculture" gets used in both cases because the word captures something a lot of people are struggling to name: a sense that the relationship between individuals and the larger culture they live in has become harder to navigate.

Standing out and belonging

This is where my own field has something useful to add.

Consumer researchers have spent decades studying how people balance two competing desires that turn out to be central to almost every cultural choice: the desire to belong to a group, and the desire to express something distinct about oneself.

My research on bicultural consumers – people who hold two cultures at once, like a first-generation Chinese American who navigates the traditions of family life at home and mainstream American culture at school or work – looks at how they manage this tension.

In my research, I found that biculturals prefer and choose "paradox brands" – brands that hold seeming contradictory meanings – more often than other consumers do. Burberry signals both centuries-old heritage and modern fashion. Range Rover holds rugged utility and luxury refinement in the same vehicle. For people who already live with contradictions every day, brands that don't force a single identity choice feel right.

That tension is exactly what all the monoculture talk is reaching for. When people lament the death of monoculture, they are often missing the experience of belonging, of sharing references and emotional beats with millions of strangers. When they lament the rise of monoculture, they are often worrying about the cost of that belonging, the way being part of a mass audience can feel like a flattening of who you actually are.

The agricultural metaphor captures both sides. A monoculture is productive precisely because it concentrates resources. It is fragile precisely because it leaves no room for what doesn't fit.

What the word can't quite say

There is one thing "monoculture" struggles to capture, and it shows up clearly in events like Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show.

By raw attention, the performance drew 128 million U.S. viewers and set a global cross-platform record with more than 4 billion views in 24 hours.

But the reception was far from uniform. To some viewers, it was a Spanish-language celebration – long overdue – of Latin Americans, both inside and outside the U.S. Some conservative critics, however, objected to a predominantly Spanish-language performance headlining America's biggest broadcast.

Scholars of culture and branding have long understood that shared cultural moments work by giving a range of different people a common cultural experience, not by forcing them to interpret it in the same way. Marketing scholar Douglas Holt's foundational work on iconic brands showed that the most powerful cultural symbols succeed because they let different audiences find different meanings in the same thing.

The word "monoculture" cannot quite hold that part of cultural experience – and it might be why people keep reaching for the term, only to see it slip through their fingers.

Maria A. Rodas is an assistant professor of business administration at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

HEALTH

Getty Images

Cheaper, alternative health plans are having a moment, but critics urge caution

By SARAH KWON
KFF Health News (TNS)

When Melanie Miller saw that her health insurance premium payment was set to nearly triple to $914 a month this year, she stopped shopping on the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

The 59-year-old retired teacher, who recently moved from Ohio to Michigan, now pays $341 a month for a pair of plans, one that covers routine and urgent care and another that pays fixed amounts for hospital stays. Neither meets federal standards for comprehensive coverage.

Though she practices yoga and is healthy, Miller said she still feels "vulnerable." If she lands in the hospital, her plan pays a flat $2,000, a fraction of the $30,000 price tag of an average hospital stay.

"I don't gamble. But I may as well," she said. "This is gambling."

Congress' decision late last year not to extend enhanced marketplace tax credits has boosted the appeal of alternatives to comprehensive insurance – plans like Miller's, which have lower premiums but don't meet ACA standards for coverage or consumer protections. Unlike plans sold on the exchanges, these options – some sold by major insurers, others by small companies or nonprofits – can deny claims with few or no legal rights for consumers to appeal. The plans are not required to cover "essential health benefits," such as preventive care, and can impose annual or lifetime caps on benefits.

There is debate over whether these options help or harm patients. Consumer advocates dismiss them as "junk insurance," while proponents say restricting alternatives to pricey marketplace plans risks driving up the number of uninsured. Some states, including Kansas and Florida, and the federal government itself have eased regulations on such plans or created incentives to join them, while other states, including California and Massachusetts, have tried to deter enrollment in alternative insurance. Those regulatory guardrails, however, are now being stress-tested as premiums blow out household budgets.

Alternative insurance takes many forms, including short-term policies, which were designed to bridge temporary gaps in coverage and often exclude preexisting conditions, and fixed-indemnity plans, which pay a flat rate per service regardless of how high costs go and are intended for supplemental use. Arrangements in which people pool their money to cover one another's bills, including faith-based "healthcare sharing ministries," also provide a cheaper alternative to the marketplace options. Because they are not considered insurance under federal or state law, they are not legally bound to pay for even eligible medical bills.

Jordan Miller / TNS

Melanie Miller, a retired teacher who lives in Michigan, looked outside the Affordable Care Act marketplace for health insurance because her premium payment was set to nearly triple. She now has two plans, one for routine and urgent care and another that pays fixed amounts for hospital stays, but neither meets federal standards for comprehensive coverage.

Enrollment data for alternative plans is mostly confidential, but several indicators point to shifts in the market. Recent estimates suggest marketplace enrollment declined about 20 percent from 2025, and a KFF survey of people on the exchanges last year found that 5 percent switched to private, nonmarketplace individual coverage, including plans that don't comply with the ACA. Covered California, the state's marketplace, plans to survey former enrollees to find out where they went.

Insurance industry insiders also report that, amid the expiration of subsidies, alternative plans are making a marketing push. Colorado insurance broker Samantha Albritton said that before ACA open enrollment, she saw more marketing from fixed-indemnity plans than in previous years. One healthcare sharing plan, Zion HealthShare, had more than 75,000 members in February – a 50 percent increase since last June, it said in a statement.

Critics of these alternative plans say the major issues occur when people use them as primary insurance and don't realize the coverage is inadequate until they need it most. "Humans have bodies that can fail them," said Amy Killelea, an assistant research professor at Georgetown University's Center on Health Insurance Reforms.

Killelea and other health insurance experts say that the fine print on these plans can be difficult to parse and that enrollees don't have the protections of traditional insurance to fall back on. A 2023 peer-reviewed study found that after reading a summary of a sample short-term policy's benefits and a disclosure that the plan was not ACA-compliant, only half of participants understood that prescription drugs were not covered.

When Jade Ramsey was 24, she declined insurance from her employer due to the cost of the premiums. After experiencing fatigue and unexplained bruising, she sought low-cost coverage from Southern Guaranty Insurance Company through a policy similar to a fixed-indemnity plan.

Two weeks after enrolling, Ramsey, who lives in Arizona, was unable to walk. An emergency room visit led to a six-day hospital stay and a $143,823 bill in 2021. She was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Her insurer denied coverage for this and other bills, labeling the cancer a preexisting condition and offering no other recourse after rejecting her appeal, she said.

Those bills landed in collections, and her credit score nose-dived. Ramsey said she once visited the ER with chest pain she attributed to the stress of the six-figure debt. She eventually qualified for Medicaid, and her credit score has since recovered even though she never paid off the debt. She said collection agencies still call, but she ignores them.

Southern Guaranty Insurance Company did not respond to requests for comment.

Proponents of alternative insurance argue that stifling these more affordable options will just increase the ranks of those without any coverage.

"People should be able to spend their own money financing healthcare the way that works best for them," said Brian Blase, president of Paragon Health Institute, an influential conservative think tank. Paragon pushed for ending the enhanced marketplace tax credits, arguing they fueled improper enrollment by heightening incentives for unscrupulous brokers to sign people up without their knowledge.

Robert Godfrey of Clearwater, Florida, appreciates having choices. When Godfrey's monthly premium payment was slated to jump from $879 to around $1,250 this year, the 64-year-old hair salon owner switched to a $320-a-month membership with Zion HealthShare. Rarely needing medical care, Godfrey viewed the shift to a cheaper plan as a pragmatic choice. "Thank God I'm healthy," he said.

The Trump administration has relaxed regulations on some alternative plans. Last year, federal agencies stopped enforcing Biden-era rules on how long short-term plans could last and how they could be marketed, then offered states a marginal advantage in the competition for a share of $50 billion in federal rural health funding if they followed suit.

In a statement, CMS spokesperson Christopher Krepich said the administration is focused on ensuring "access to affordable coverage options, strengthening competition, and reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens, while maintaining appropriate consumer protections."

State oversight of alternative insurance is a patchwork. In much of the nation, these plans face few restrictions. Many states, including Florida, Arizona, and Indiana, have eased limits on short-term plans in the wake of the Trump administration's moves, allowing them to be renewed for up to three years in total.

In Kansas, lawmakers overrode the governor's veto to pass a bill in March providing a tax break for people who enroll in healthcare sharing ministries. In her veto, Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly warned that these ministries are unregulated, "which opens the door to all sorts of fraud and abuse." Kansas House Speaker Daniel Hawkins countered in a news release that "House Republicans believe families should have more flexibility and more control over their healthcare decisions, not fewer options and higher costs."

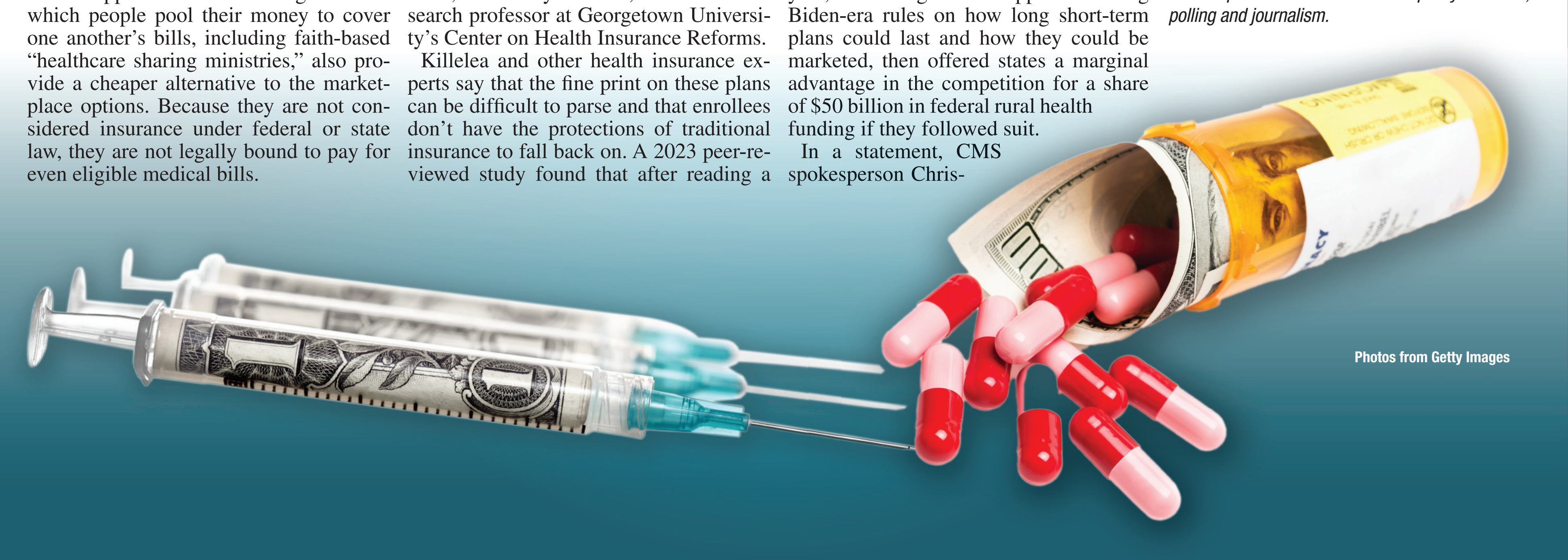
Oklahoma weighed a similar bill earlier this year, though it did not pass.

Not all states are friendly toward alternative plans. Over a dozen ban short-term policies or have rules restrictive enough to deter insurers from selling them. California and Massachusetts are among the states with the most stringent rules, banning short-term plans and requiring clear warnings to people considering a healthcare sharing ministry in certain circumstances. Both also tax adults who forgo comprehensive coverage, while subsidizing marketplace premiums to encourage enrollment.

Still, the higher premiums will test these guardrails, said Héctor Hernández-Delgado, a director at the National Health Law Program, which advocates for quality healthcare for low-income people. He worries that consumers lured by the plans' low prices could "be worse off down the road," saddled with burdensome medical debt.

Now in remission, Ramsey urges those considering cheaper insurance to do careful research. "Make sure it's covering what you need to be covered," she said. "It could be too good to be true."

KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.



Photos from Getty Images

Dr. ChatGPT is getting remarkably good at diagnosing health problems

However actual doctors are still better at weighing your treatment options

By ANDREW PARSONS
University of Virginia (The Conversation)

A father is worried about his toddler, who has been running a fever for two days and pulling at one ear. A 65-year-old woman has been getting winded on her morning walks and feeling more fatigued than usual. Both reach for their phones and type their symptoms into an AI chatbot.

"Your child likely has an ear infection," the father learns. "Your symptoms could indicate a cardiac condition," the woman reads.

Those are helpful answers – and there's a good chance they're correct. Artificial intelligence is approaching, and in some cases exceeding, doctors' ability to make accurate diagnoses. An April 2026 study found OpenAI's o1 model had a 78 percent accuracy rate on complex diagnostic cases published in the New England Journal of Medicine and also outperformed experienced doctors when diagnosing actual emergency room patients. Similarly, ChatGPT, working on its own, outperformed physicians in diagnosing complex cases, a 2024 study found – even when the physicians were able to use ChatGPT themselves.

Making a correct diagnosis, though, is only half a doctor's job. The other half is knowing what to do about it – in other words, deciding how to manage a patient's health condition.

I am a doctor and medical educator studying how doctors make these decisions, a process known as management reasoning, and how doctors in training develop this ability. For clear-cut health concerns, an AI diagnosis may be enough for someone to get the care they need – a little numbing cream for a baby's gums, say, or an appointment with a cardiologist.

But uncertainty is common in clinical practice. Often, knowing what ails a patient is necessary but not sufficient for determining how to care for them. And how to manage a patient, even after the diagnosis is settled, is a complex question.

Diagnosis categorizes, but management prioritizes

Experienced doctors do not assess each patient from scratch. Over years of practice, they build mental shortcuts called illness scripts.

Illness scripts are more than symptom checklists. They capture what a disease typically looks like, who tends to get it and how it most often progresses. When a doctor sees a new patient, they match what they observe against these mental scripts – a process of categorization and pattern recognition.

When a patient appears with a familiar pattern of signs and symptoms, a doctor calls up the matching mental script almost without thinking. This frees them to notice elements that don't quite align: a symptom that doesn't fit, or a detail in the patient's history – a recent trip abroad, an unusual exposure at work – that points toward a different diagnosis.

It's not surprising that AI is good at this pattern-matching process. Large language models like ChatGPT work in a similar way. They predict what word should come next in a sentence based on patterns learned from enormous amounts of text, including the medical literature. In that literature, the word "pneumonia" reliably follows certain symptom patterns: fever, say, combined with a cloudy patch on a chest X-ray. Pattern matching, at this level, is essentially the same thing a doctor does when fitting a patient's symptoms to an illness script.

But deciding what to do next – what tests to run, what treatments to try, what to monitor and what to follow up on – works differently. Instead of one right answer, a doctor faces multiple reasonable options. The art of medical management is prioritizing which among these options is best for the patient in front of you.

The human advantage

So how does a doctor go from diagnosing a patient to figuring out how best to care for them? The answer is almost always, "It depends."

Consider two men, Marcus and Tomás, both 68, both just diagnosed with early-stage prostate cancer. Their biopsies show the same thing: a slow-growing tumor confined to the prostate.

Both are offered the same two management options. Treat now, with surgery or radiation, accepting the risks of urinary incontinence and changes to sexual function. Or monitor closely with regular tests and biopsies, treating only if it grows. A study that followed more than 82,000 men with early-stage prostate cancer for 15 years found that fewer than 3 in 100 died of their prostate cancer regardless of which path they chose, though men who chose monitoring were about twice as likely to see their cancer spread.

AI can present both options alongside those statistics. What a doctor brings is knowledge of the person sitting across from them.

Marcus has no other significant health conditions. His doctor knows this, and knows Marcus well enough to know that uncertainty sits badly with him. For a patient without other pressing health concerns, a slow-growing tumor has time to progress and become something more serious. Both management paths are genuinely reasonable, but Marcus cannot live with waiting. Knowing cancer is in his body, watched but untreated, is not something he can set aside. He chooses treatment.

Tomás has advanced heart failure, something his doctor has been managing alongside him for years. She knows that his heart condition poses a more immediate threat to his health than this slow-growing tumor does. She knows, too, that he watched a friend go through radiation and come out diminished. Treating aggressively would mean bearing real costs for a benefit that may never arrive. She recommends active surveillance. For Tomás, it is the right answer and a relief.

Different management decisions are the norm in medicine. The right path for any patient depends on who that patient is and what they value, and on a doctor's judgment about where the evidence is reliable and where genuine uncertainty remains.

Judging risk and uncertainty

To decide how to manage a patient's condition, a doctor first considers evidence from the medical literature and then applies the available management options to the patient's particular circumstances. This requires honest communication , shared decision-making, jointly navigating risk and acknowledging uncertainty.

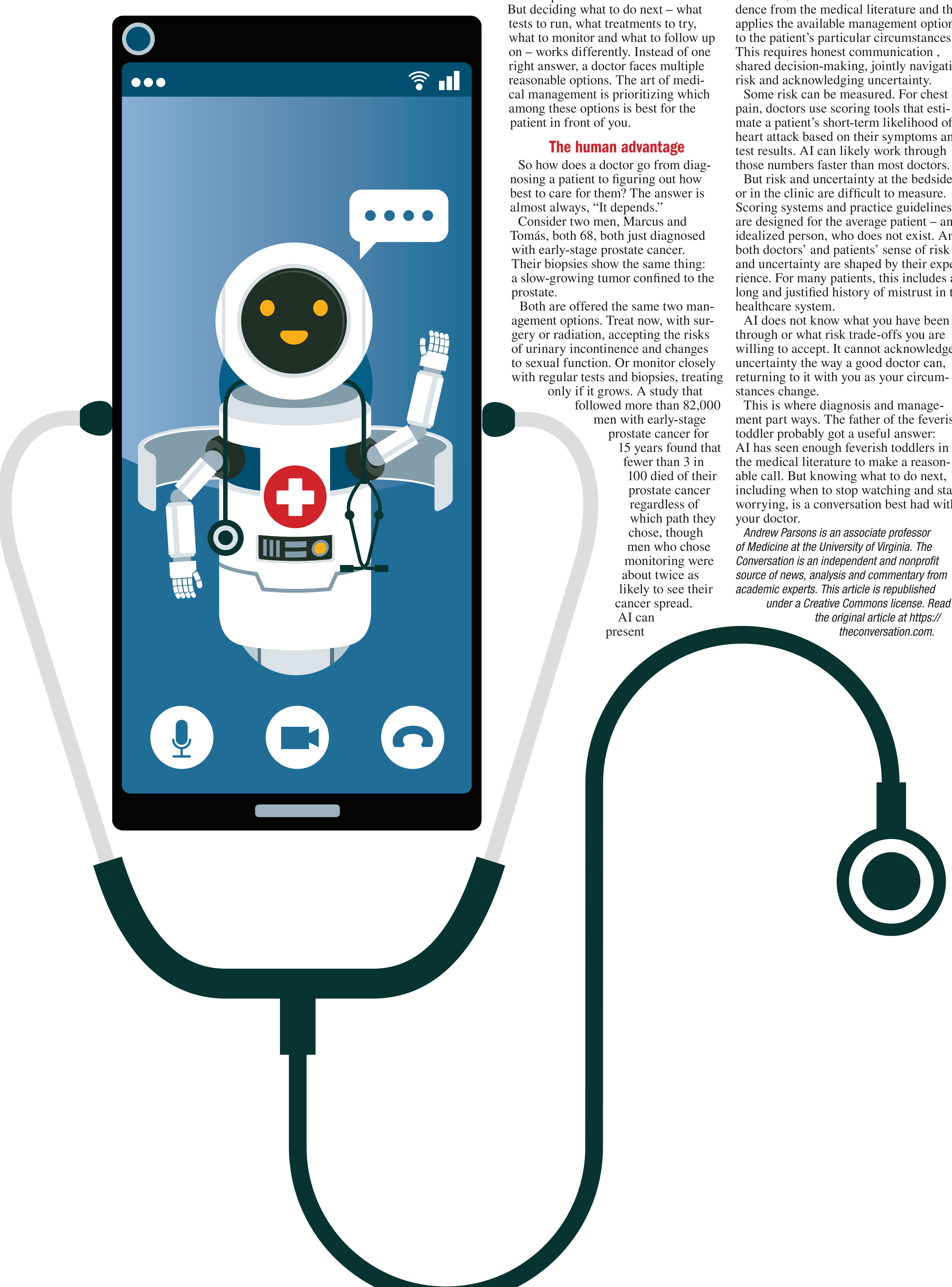
Some risk can be measured. For chest pain, doctors use scoring tools that estimate a patient's short-term likelihood of a heart attack based on their symptoms and test results. AI can likely work through those numbers faster than most doctors.

But risk and uncertainty at the bedside or in the clinic are difficult to measure. Scoring systems and practice guidelines are designed for the average patient – an idealized person, who does not exist. And both doctors' and patients' sense of risk and uncertainty are shaped by their experience. For many patients, this includes a long and justified history of mistrust in the healthcare system.

AI does not know what you have been through or what risk trade-offs you are willing to accept. It cannot acknowledge uncertainty the way a good doctor can, returning to it with you as your circumstances change.

This is where diagnosis and management part ways. The father of the feverish toddler probably got a useful answer: AI has seen enough feverish toddlers in the medical literature to make a reasonable call. But knowing what to do next, including when to stop watching and start worrying, is a conversation best had with your doctor.

Andrew Parsons is an associate professor of Medicine at the University of Virginia. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.



Getty Images

Low-calorie sweetener carries hidden liver danger

By KARL HILLE
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)

The common sugar-free sweetener sorbitol may damage your liver in the same way as the older sweetener fructose, researchers found, triggering processes linked to fatty liver disease in people without a history of drinking alcohol.

"The most surprising finding from the current work is that because sorbitol is essentially 'one transformation away from fructose,' it can induce similar effects," senior author Gary Patti, professor of chemistry, genetics and medicine at Washington University Medicine, told SciTechDaily.

Gut microbes play a key role.

"If you have the right bacteria, turns out, it doesn't matter," Patti said. "However, if you don't have the right bacteria, that's when it becomes problematic. Because in those conditions, sorbitol doesn't get degraded and as a result, it is passed on to the liver."

In studies with zebrafish – whose digestive processes resemble those of humans – researchers from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, found that fish with gut biota depleted by antibiotics converted glucose and sorbitol into fructose in the intestines, leading to an unhealthy buildup of fat in the liver.

Sorbitol, touted for its low-calorie count and marketed as diabetes-friendly, behaves much like fructose in the body under these conditions. Fructose, coming in at 4 calories per gram, is popularly used in soft drinks and processed foods because it does not interact with blood insulin. However, it has been strongly tied to liver disease affecting up to 25 percent of adults and a growing number of younger people.

The liver is the largest organ inside the body and is essential to digesting food, storing energy and clearing poisons from the blood. With few symptoms, most people aren't diagnosed with fatty liver until it advances towards cirrhosis or liver cancer, according to MedlinePlus. People with type 2 diabetes or prediabetic conditions are most at risk, along with factors like obesity, age and high cholesterol and blood pressure. Symptoms can include being excessively tired or having pain in the upper right part of your abdomen.

The research suggests that sorbitol and fructose can be as bad for your liver as excessive drinking – the other main cause of fatty liver disease – while a healthy gut biome helps protect your liver. Regular, low levels of sorbitol are not likely to cause harm, the researchers said.

They published their findings in Science Signaling.

Weight lost with GLP-1 drugs still subject to rebound after stopping treatment

By KARL HILLE
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)

For many, GLP-1 drugs like Zepbound and Wegovy offered an ideal solution to diabetes and weight loss: a shot or pill that regulates blood sugar, curbs appetite and promotes weight loss without the need for complicated diet and exercise regimens. Today, one in eight Americans takes some form of GLP-1 medication, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll.

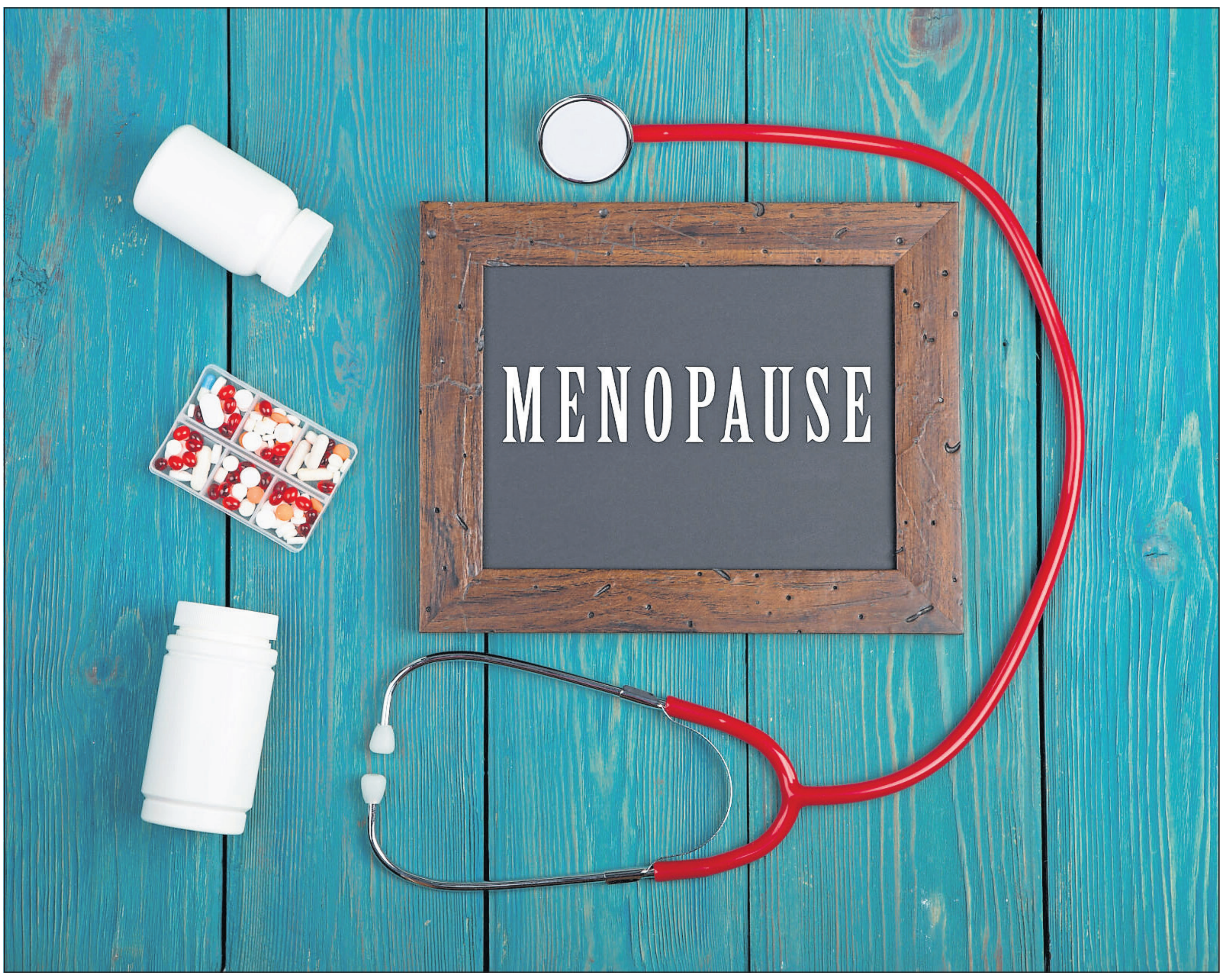
However, most weight loss patients eventually quit the drugs, and then the weight comes back just like it does after people quit their old-school diets. Two studies published this year hope to prevent that rebound, through a daily oral GLP-1 replacement or a bacterial supplement called Akkermansia muciniphila.

Those who switched from an injected GLP-1 to an oral orforglipron daily dose managed to maintain 74 percent to 79 percent of their weight loss after five to six weeks, the international team of researchers, including Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, found. Those who took a placebo kept off 38 percent to 49 percent of the pounds lost under the injectable drug. The study, funded by orforglipron-maker Eli Lilly, was published in Nature Medicine.

Another trial tracked 80 adults who lost weight in an eight-week, low-calorie diet before returning to a regular, balanced diet supplemented with either an Akkermansia muciniphila supplement or a placebo. Those taking the supplement managed to keep off an additional six pounds compared with those who took the placebo after six months. This study, funded by the supplement-maker Akkermansia Company, was also published in the May edition of Nature Medicine.

While researchers in both studies suggested a need to follow people over a longer recovery period, their work suggests there is no easy way around long-term weight management practices, including improving diet and exercise.

STUDY



Anastasiia Gergelizhiu / Dreamstime / TNS

Menopause affects more than 1 million women each year in the U.S., and up to 75 percent experience symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats that can last for years.

Hormone therapy use for menopause declines despite proven benefits

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Hormone therapy use among women in the U.S. remains low, even though it's an effective treatment for many menopause symptoms, according to a new Mayo Clinic study published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings.

Menopause affects more than 1 million women each year in the U.S., and up to 75 percent experience symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats that can last for years. Yet researchers found that use of menopausal hormone therapy has steadily declined over time.

The study found that hormone therapy use dropped from 4.4 percent in 2007 to 1.7 percent in 2023. Even among women most likely to benefit – those ages 50 to 59 – only about 3.5 percent were using hormone therapy in 2023.

"We have strong evidence that hormone therapy is safe and effective for many women, but that hasn't translated into how it's used in clinical practice," says Stephanie Faubion, M.D., director of Mayo Clinic's Center for Women's Health and study author.

Researchers expected hormone therapy use to rebound in recent years as awareness of menopause has increased. Instead, rates remain at their lowest level since the early 2000s, following concerns raised after the Women's Health Initiative trial.

The new study analyzed nationwide trends in hormone therapy use among women 40 and older between 2007 and 2023 using a large U.S. health database. Hormone therapy use was defined as having at least 180 days of filled prescriptions within a given year.

In addition to the overall decline, researchers found differences across racial and ethnic groups. Use was consistently higher among white women compared with Black, Hispanic and Asian American women. Oral therapies remained the most common, although both oral and transdermal treatments declined over time.

Despite growing public conversation about menopause, the findings suggest that increased awareness has not translated into greater use of the effective treatment.

Researchers say several factors may have contributed to the findings, including ongoing misconceptions about risks, limited menopause training among clinicians, and patient concerns or lack of awareness.

"The abundance of misinformation around hormone therapy is one reason some women are not getting treatment," says Dr. Faubion. "Many are seeking care for symptoms but aren't receiving therapies that could help."

Hormone therapy is not appropriate for every patient. However, for many women – particularly those younger than 60 or within 10 years of menopause – it remains a safe and effective option for symptom relief. Even low-dose vaginal estrogen, which has a favorable safety profile, remains underused.

Untreated menopause symptoms can affect sleep, mood and overall quality of life. Some women may seek care from multiple specialists without a clear diagnosis or treatment plan. Symptoms also may affect workplace productivity.

Researchers say the next step is to better understand and address the barriers preventing women from receiving appropriate care.

"Despite increased attention on menopause, we still have a long way to go," says Dr. Faubion. "Improving education for both patients and clinicians will be key to closing this gap."

Poop tests and blood tests join colonoscopy as options for colorectal cancer screening

By ANDREA DWYER
University of Colorado Anschutz
(The Conversation)

THE CONVERSATION

It's increasingly common to see headlines and social media conversations about the rise in colorectal cancer among younger adults. In fact, the growing incidence of colorectal cancer in people under age 50 helped drive the American Cancer Society's 2018 decision to recommend lowering the recommended age for average-risk screening from 50 to 45.

Riding on the momentum of increasing public awareness of colorectal cancer, the society has now released updated screening guidelines in May 2026 to include new tests that reflect the latest science and could improve access to care.

I am a public health researcher who has spent nearly 20 years developing colorectal cancer prevention programs and studying ways to improve screening guidelines. Offering more options for screening can help detect cancer earlier or prevent it altogether.

What's new in the updated screening guidelines?

The updated guidelines have added two additional screening options.

The first option is an at-home screening test that checks stool samples for hidden blood and other molecular markers that may indicate the presence of colorectal cancer. The guidelines recommend taking these tests every three years.

The other option is a blood-based screening test that can be done at a doctor's office. Patients who refuse a colonoscopy or a stool-based screening test can choose this test.

Notably, the updated guidelines still offer patients a choice between a stool test and a direct visual exam – such as a colonoscopy – as the primary screening methods.

It is also still recommended that adults with an average risk of colorectal cancer should start screening at age 45, and keep getting screened until age 75 or, if recommended by a doctor, beyond that.

Which colorectal cancer screening test is better?

For people with a family history of colorectal cancer or genetic or hereditary syndromes – or signs and symptoms of colorectal cancer, such as blood in the stool – a colonoscopy is the only recommended test.

If you are age 45 and at average risk, your doctor may recommend the stool tests and blood tests. Because these are new options, however, many doctor's offices may not be immediately offering the tests.

Ultimately, the best test is the one that gets done.

Can I do a blood or stool test instead of a colonoscopy?

Colonoscopy remains the preferred screening test for colorectal cancer. It's the only option for those experiencing signs and symptoms of colorectal cancer, and it's the recommended test for those who are at increased risk. Those with an average risk may still be recommended to receive a colonoscopy.

Stool tests do not require the same amount of preparation as a colonoscopy and are widely used. The new stool tests have evolved in their ability to detect polyps and abnormal cells in samples.

The new blood tests are recommended only if a patient refuses a colonoscopy or a stool test. It is important to note the new blood tests are not as sensitive as the other tests for preventing cancer, though science is advancing to provide more options.

Bottom line (pun intended): A colonoscopy will also be required if a stool or blood test results in a positive or abnormal finding.

What are early symptoms of colon cancer?

There are often no early signs or symptoms of colorectal cancer, so starting screening at age 45 is a must, especially if you have a family history or genetic risk of developing colorectal cancer.

Common symptoms of colorectal cancer include blood in the stool, change in bowel habits or stool, pain, or unexplained weight loss of 10 or more pounds.

If you notice these symptoms, regardless of your age, talk to your doctor and consider requesting a colonoscopy.

How can I reduce my risk of colon cancer?

To reduce your risk of colorectal cancer, people who are at average risk of the disease should begin screening at age 45.

Pay attention to your body. Note any concerning changes or symptoms, and have open conversations with your healthcare provider.

Healthy lifestyle choices can also help reduce your risk of colorectal cancer. This includes at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day, eating a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables and limiting processed foods. Reducing your alcohol intake and avoiding smoking and vaping can also lower your risk of colorectal and other cancers.

Andrea Dwyer is director of the Colorado Cancer Screening Program at the University of Colorado Anschutz. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://the conversation.com.

Pediatricians often watch for signs that one illness might signal another. One example of linked health issues is the allergic march, a pattern that affects many babies and children worldwide. Zivica Kerkez / Dreamstime / TNS

ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

From eczema to allergies to asthma: Understanding the allergic march

By DANIEL DIGIACOMO, M.D., MPH, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Pediatricians often watch for signs that one illness might signal another. One example of linked health issues is the allergic march, a pattern that affects many babies and children worldwide.

The allergic march – also called the atopic march – is a chain of health problems that typically happen one after the other. All may have common roots in the immune system.

The first sign is usually atopic dermatitis, a form of eczema that often appears before a child's first birthday. Atopic dermatitis causes dry, itchy, scaly patches on a baby's skin that may signal increased risks for food allergies, hay fever, allergic pink eye and asthma.

For some children, another condition called eosinophilic esophagitis can appear later in the allergic march. Eosinophilic esophagitis is an allergic inflammation of the esophagus, the tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach. It can make swallowing difficult and cause symptoms like vomiting or abdominal pain.

Ongoing studies show that the allergic march can unfold in many different ways. For example, it might begin with food allergies instead of atopic dermatitis. Additionally, more than one condition might emerge at the same time, instead of one following the others. Some younger children will have atopic dermatitis and allergies but never progress to asthma, which shows that the allergic march will not happen for everyone. However, studies confirm that 1 of every 3 babies and toddlers who have atopic dermatitis will develop allergies or asthma later on.

Research suggests that the allergic march begins in the immune system, which defends a child's body against infections that can make them sick. Kids with allergic-march conditions may have sensitive immune systems that fight harder than they should when they're exposed to certain triggers (allergens). These triggers don't usually sicken other kids, but in others, the abnormal immune response caused by the triggers leads to the development of these later allergic conditions, some of which are life long and can be life-threatening.

Allergens that can cause flare-ups in young children include foods they can eat, as well as irritants they can breathe in or that can interact with their skin. Foods made with eggs, peanuts, cow's milk, fish, soybeans, tree nuts, wheat or sesame can cause reactions in some children. Additionally, environmental factors such as tobacco smoke, pollution, pollen, dust, pet dander, laundry soaps, fragrances and more can irritate children's skin or breathing passages.

Though there's strong scientific proof that allergies and asthma run in families, genes may not be the only cause. Studies have linked childhood obesity, especially before age 2, with elevated asthma risks. In addition, a less diverse diet in pregnant mothers is linked to food allergy and asthma risk.

Kids with allergic-march conditions may have sensitive immune systems that fight harder than they should when they're exposed to certain triggers (allergens). These triggers don't usually sicken other kids, but in others, the abnormal immune response caused by the triggers leads to the development of these later allergic conditions, some of which are life long and can be life-threatening.

Kids with heavy exposure to polluted air, tobacco smoke, animal dander and other irritants may develop allergies at higher rates than others. Black, Hispanic and Indigenous children are more vulnerable to asthma than white children, which might reflect high levels of allergens where some families live or difficulties in getting effective care. If you're worried about your child's risks, talk with your pediatrician about protective strategies.

There is no single treatment that stops the allergic march in its tracks, but there are ways to slow its progress. Sharing your family health history with your child's doctor is a helpful first step. Risks for eczema, allergies and asthma tend to run in families, so it's wise to discuss possible risks with your pediatrician.

Prevention can begin even before babies are born. Eating a balanced, nutrient-rich diet and avoiding antibiotics or antacids while you're expecting can strengthen your infant's immune system. Research shows that vaginal deliveries – whenever safe and possible – may contribute to healthy immunity too.

Once your baby arrives, preventive steps include ensuring a healthy skin barrier to prevent easy access for triggers to enter the body and providing effective allergy care to reduce the risk of asthma developing. Exposing your child to some foods early such as peanuts or eggs can also help teach their body to tolerate them. Allergen immunotherapy as a shot or oral tablet can be given to work with an immune system to prevent flare ups of hay fever, asthma or even eczema. Allergen avoidance measures, allergy medicines and breathing treatments may be part of your child's care plan too.

Talk with your child's doctor if you see signs of illness that could be linked to the allergic march. Diagnostic tests can help confirm any suspicions so you and your pediatrician can create an effective wellness plan for your child. Diagnosing and treating allergic-march conditions can help kids lead active, healthy lives.

Daniel DiGiacomo, MD, MPH, FAAP, is a pediatric allergist/immunologist at K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital at Jersey Shore University Medical Center. He completed his pediatrics residency at Children's National Medical Center and fellowship training at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Dr. DiGiacomo, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Sections on Allergy and Immunology and Epidemiology, Public Health and Evidence, has a clinical interest in infant food allergy. He enjoys spending time at the beach with his family during his time off and is an avid New York sports fan.

FINANCE

Juan Moyano / Dreamstime / TNS

Your credit score is one of the most important numbers in your financial life.

Moving from fair to very good credit could save you $54,000 over the lifetime of your mortgage

By TED ROSSMAN
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Credit score	Interest rate	Monthly payment	Monthly savings	Annual savings	Lifetime savings (30-year term)
620 (fair)	7.14%	$2,188	–	–	–
680 (good)	6.79%	$2,112	$76	$912	$27,360
740 (very good)	6.44%	$2,037	$151	$1,812	$54,360
780 (excellent)	6.25%	$1,996	$192	$2,304	$69,120

Your credit score is one of the most important numbers in your financial life. It goes a long way toward determining whether you're approved for loans, along with the interest rates you're charged.

That impact is most significant for mortgages given that it costs a lot of money to buy a home and the loan stretches on for a long time (30 years, in most cases). The thing is, you can't snap your fingers and improve your credit score when you suddenly decide you want to buy a home. You know all those months or even years you've been saving for your down payment? During that time, you should already be thinking about your credit score and how it can help – or hurt – you when it comes time to make that home purchase.

In other words, don't focus so much on whether you can afford a home that you forget to focus on setting yourself up for mortgage success along the way.

Running the numbers

"OK, but homes are expensive no matter your credit score. It can't matter that much if my score is a little lower than the next person's, right?"

Consider this example: The median U.S. home sales price is $405,300. If you put 20 percent down, that means you need to borrow $324,240. The average 30-year mortgage rate ranges almost a full percentage point from fair credit to excellent credit, and that difference can really add up.

A 620 FICO score – solidly in the fair credit range – is the minimum standard to qualify for a conventional mortgage. Experian says the average 30-year mortgage rate for someone with a 620 credit score is 7.14 percent. If you borrow $324,240 for 30 years at 7.14 percent, your monthly principal and interest payment is $2,188.

If you're able to bump your credit score up to 680 (good credit), the average 30-year fixed mortgage rate is 6.79 percent. Borrowing $324,240 for 30 years at 6.79 percent equates to a monthly payment of $2,112, a savings of $76 per month and $27,360 over the life of the loan.

Crossing into the "very good" credit score range with a 740 score, the average 30-year fixed mortgage rate drops further, to 6.44 percent. Now you're looking at a monthly principal and interest payment of $2,037. That's $151 per month lower than our fair credit example and $75 per month less than the good credit scenario – savings of $54,360 and $27,000 over the full terms of those respective loans.

Even though the FICO credit scoring scale runs from 300 to 850, for most financial products, the mid-700s is good enough. For something like a credit card or auto loan, there's not usually a practical benefit to scoring, say, 800 or 780 versus 740. For mortgages, though, the high-end cutoff is 780.

The average 30-year fixed mortgage rate for a borrower with an excellent credit score of 780 is 6.25 percent. That brings the monthly principal and interest payment down to $1,996 on our hypothetical $324,240 loan, $192 per month less than the 620 credit score example. Over 30 years, we're talking about a whopping $69,120 in interest savings.

See included table for more information.

A lifetime of opportunity

It's easy to brush off saving $1,000 or $2,000 a year as "not a big deal" and those 30-year term savings seem too distant to really matter. But consider what investing that extra money over the years could do for you. Or consider that extra money paying for things like vacations or college or even going into a rainy day fund to help with unexpected expenses. The savings add up!

A guide to improving your credit score over time

Improving your score won't happen overnight, but it can happen over the course of several months, or better yet, years. The steps are simple:

Establish a baseline. Start by checking your credit scores and reports so you know where you stand and can correct any potential errors (they do happen!). Many banks and credit card issuers provide their customers with access at no cost. You can also utilize free resources such as AnnualCreditReport.com, Experian.com and MyFICO.com.

If legitimate negatives are dragging your credit score down, you'll want to start right away adding positive marks to your file. Late payments can stay on your credit reports for up to seven years. Want some good news? The negative impacts are most pronounced within the first two years.

Ask for a break. You could ask your creditor for a goodwill deletion, which involves asking them to remove a blemish because you were an otherwise reliable customer who slipped up once in a blue moon. Explain your situation and make sure to be truthful.

Sign up for the right accounts. One credit-building tool that can pay off quickly is becoming an authorized user on the account of a trusted person with their own excellent credit history. This allows you to piggyback off their long track record of on-time payments and responsible credit behaviors.

Filling your credit reports with good information can help counteract negative marks on your report. This won't make the bad stuff go away, but it can still help. In general, credit scoring systems reward thicker credit files. The more you can show that you've successfully managed various types of credit, the better.

Besides signing up for a credit card that's easy to get, like a secured card or a student card (if applicable) and using it responsibly, you could also consider signing up for a credit-builder loan. The general premise is that you set money aside each month and then you get to keep most of it at the end of the term (perhaps six to 12 months), minus some small fees. These typically show up on credit reports as installment loans, so it's another form of credit, different from revolving credit, showing in your file.

I'm also a big fan of alternative credit monitoring systems such as Experian Boost and eCredable Lift. These can identify things that you're already doing – such as paying rent, utilities and streaming service subscription bills on time – and pull them into your credit reports. Traditional credit scoring algorithms don't incorporate all of these payments, so you need to do a little legwork to get them included.

Recent credit scoring changes could work in your favor

There has been a lot of innovation in credit scoring in recent years. Government-backed mortgage lenders recently received approval to use newer credit scoring programs such as FICO 10T and VantageScore 4.0, which makes it more likely your mortgage application can benefit from things like Experian Boost and eCredable Lift. One note: These services only report to Experian and TransUnion, respectively. Mortgage lenders typically pull information from all three major credit bureaus (Experian, TransUnion and Equifax), often using the middle score for each applicant.

But one of the most impactful of these recent innovations is the introduction of trended data. That refers to credit scoring systems that measure patterns, rather than just a singular moment in time. It impacts how the algorithms measure credit utilization (credit you're using divided by credit available to you, especially on revolving accounts such as credit cards).

Until recently, credit utilization started fresh every month. The credit scoring systems didn't have any memory, if you will. You could be using a very high 80 percent of your credit limit one month but pay it down to 10 percent the next month and your credit score could be noticeably higher. But now, the systems incorporate up to 24 months of trended data. If your utilization is usually low but spikes once in a while, that shouldn't hurt your score much. On the other hand, if your utilization is typically high, knocking it down one month won't make a big difference.

This aligns with the idea that credit scoring is more of a marathon than a sprint. Credit scoring systems – and the lenders they serve – want to see a longstanding track record of on-time payments and low utilization. Therefore, seek to keep your credit card bills relatively low, perhaps showing statement balances between 1 percent and 30 percent of your credit limit and, ideally, paying these off in full before interest hits.

The bottom line

Some credit score fixes are quicker than others. Nothing spurs people like a deadline, but honestly, it's best to give your credit score regular care and attention. I know people get busy with other things and your credit score isn't always top of mind, but at least six months – the longer the better – before you get serious about house hunting and mortgage shopping, pull your credit reports and scores and begin making any needed adjustments.

I'll leave you with one final recommendation: Don't apply for any other credit during the mortgage process. Applying for a credit card or an auto loan during that sensitive time period can make lenders nervous. Prioritize the mortgage and hold off on everything else until later.

Getting the best mortgage rate can save you tens of thousands of dollars. Improving your credit score and shopping around aggressively are the best ways to nab the lowest mortgage rates.

Visit Bankrate online at bankrate.com.

FOOD

Succulent crispy chili beef from Jeremy Pang's "Chinese Kitchen."
Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS

GRETCHEN'S TABLE

Why do takeout when you can make spicy Chinese beef at home?

By PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE (TNS)

It's the rare diner who doesn't love the occasional Chinese takeout.

It's convenient, has extensive menu choices and, because it's often intended to be shared, can be more affordable for a couple or family than traditional sit-down restaurants. Order enough, and there's also the thrill of leftovers.

Yet given the laundry list of ingredients some dishes require and the need for precise mise en place – wok cooking is fast, so you better have everything ready to go before you start – you have to wonder: Is it worth making at home?

Jeremy Pang, the British-Chinese chef who founded London's School of Wok in 2012, hopes to ease some of that hesitation in his latest cookbook, "Jeremy Pang's Chinese Kitchen: Simple Techniques. Delicious Recipes" (Hamlyn, $30).

Its 80-plus Asian-inspired recipes from across East and Southeast Asia are designed with the home cook in mind with clear, easy-to-follow instructions along with a guide to Chinese kitchen and pantry essentials. He also offers tips on seasoning and maintaining a wok and seven "golden rules" for stir frying.

Pang writes he has a "bit of a soft spot" for this popular dish featuring crispy strips of beef in a tangy-spicy sauce even though it's more often associated with takeout than traditional home cooking.

Thanks to its interplay of textures and flavors and quick prep, I'm guessing you, too, will walk away from the table completely satisfied. Chopsticks optional.

Succulent Chinese Beef

Serves 4

FOR BEEF:

7 ounces rump steak or sirloin, cut across the grain into thin strips about 1/8-inch thick
14 ounces cornstarch
1/2 teaspoon each salt and black pepper
1 thumb-sized piece of ginger, peeled and finely diced
3 garlic cloves, finely diced
2 birds' eye chiles, finely diced
Vegetable oil, for deep frying
Large handful cilantro, finely chopped, for garnish

FOR MARINADE:

1 egg, beaten
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
2 teaspoons sesame oil
1 teaspoon sugar

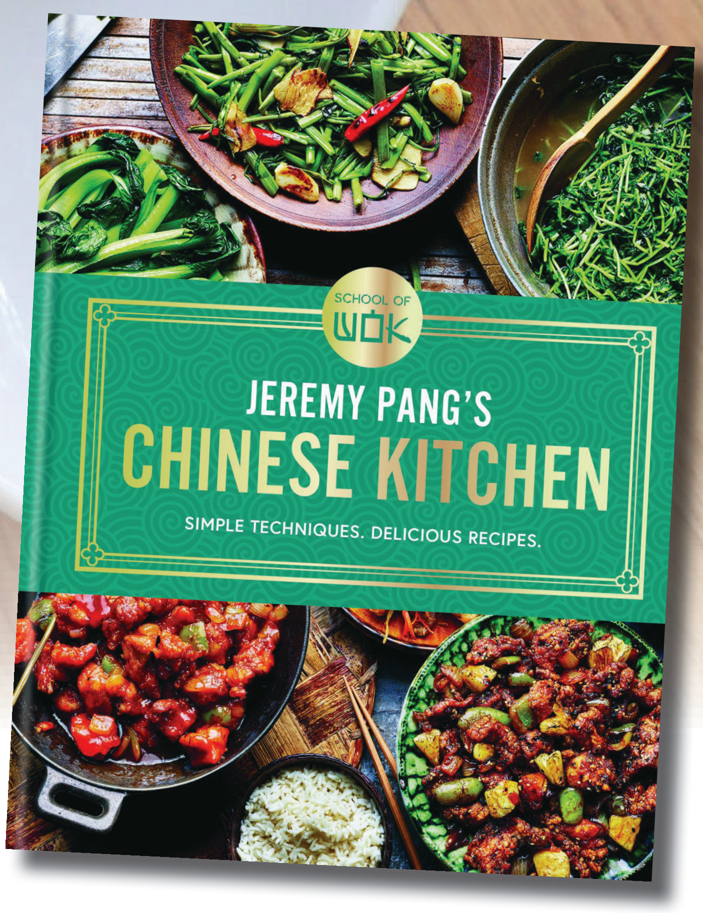
FOR SAUCE:

6 tablespoons black or rice vinegar
4 tablespoons honey
3 tablespoons ketchup
1/2 tablespoon dark soy sauce
Steamed white or brown rice for serving

Put beef into a mixing bowl, add the marinade ingredients and, using your hands, massage them into the meat pieces until they are evenly coated.

Season cornstarch with ½ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper. Add to bowl of beef and massage it into the meat. The meat will stick together in clumps at first but will start to separate as you continue to massage it.

Once all meat has completely separated, it is ready to fry. (I shook the excess off and put it in a clean bowl.)



"Chinese Kitchen," by Jeremy Pang.
Hamlyn / TNS

Prepare sauce: In a small bowl, combine vinegar, honey, ketchup and soy sauce and mix well.

Build your "wok clock" on the work surface. Start at 12 o'clock with the coated marinated beef, followed by ginger, garlic and birds' eye chiles, and finally the bowl of sauce.

Half-fill wok with vegetable oil and heat to 350 degrees, or until the the tip of a wooden chopstick or skewer starts to sizzle after 2 or 3 seconds in the oil.

Carefully add beef to the hot oil and deep-fry for 2-3 minutes or until golden brown. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain well on a plate lined with paper towels. (I did it in several batches.)

Carefully pour the oil into the wok through a sieve and into a saucepan to cool.

Heat 2 tablespoons of reserved vegetable oil in the wok over high heat until smoking hot. Add ginger, garlic and chiles, reduce heat to medium and stir-fry for 30 seconds until fragrant.

Pour over the sauce and bring to a vigorous boil, then add crispy beef and give wok 2 or 3 tosses to mix everything together.

Spoon into a serving bowl, scatter cilantro to garnish and serve immediately.

– "Jeremy Pang's Chinese Kitchen"

Savory Oven-Baked Chicken Thighs with Roasted Potatoes and Asparagus

By LINDA GASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service (TNS)

For this easy, hands-off dinner, the oven does all the work. Bone-in chicken thighs, coated in rich pasta sauce, roasted on a sheet pan will stay tender, juicy, and full of flavor.

To save time, the potatoes and asparagus get a head start in the microwave before finishing alongside the chicken, soaking up all those delicious pan juices.

Lining the sheet pan with foil makes cleanup easy. It just needs a quick rinse and you're done.

Creamer potatoes are small, about 3/4-inch in diameter, and new potatoes are a little larger and measure about 2-inches in diameter. Both are tender, flavorful potatoes that have a short spring season. Either can be used.

HELPFUL HINTS:

- Any type of pasta sauce can be used.
- Green beans can be used instead of asparagus.

Savory Oven-Baked Chicken Thighs with Roasted Potatoes and Asparagus

Yield 2 servings

1 pound bone in chicken thighs, skin removed
Olive oil spray
1 cup pasta sauce
3/4 pound creamer potatoes washed with skin on, about 2 cups
1/4 pound asparagus cut into 2-inch pieces about 2 cups cut
1 tablespoon olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a large baking sheet with foil. Place chicken thighs skin side up on one side of the sheet. Spray them with olive oil spray. Spoon pasta sauce over the chicken. Place sheet in heated oven for 15 minutes. While chicken bakes, place potatoes in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave on high 2 minutes. Add the asparagus to the bowl with the potatoes and microwave 2 minutes. Add the olive oil and salt and pepper to taste. Toss well. After the chicken bakes for 15 minutes. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and add the potatoes and asparagus to the empty side of the sheet. Sprinkle the Parmesan cheese over the chicken and place the sheet back in the oven.

Bake 5 minutes. A meat thermometer should read 165 degrees for the chicken. Divide the chicken, potatoes and asparagus in half and place on two dinner plates.

– Recipe by Linda Gassenheimer

Linda Gassenheimer is the author of over 30 cookbooks, including her newest, "The 12-Week Diabetes Cookbook." Listen to Linda on www.WDNA.org and all major podcast sites. Email her at Linda@DinnerInMinutes.com.

PBS

Mark Gatiss stars as Gabriel Book in "Bookish."

15 brilliant British crime dramas to keep you cool for the summer

By MARY McNAMARA
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Summer, and all the vacation days and potential travel that implies, is upon us. And whether flying internationally or taking time off at home, you can't beat a good British crime drama as the ultimate self-soother (especially in summer when the U.K.'s inevitable drizzly city streets and windswept moors can provide at least visual relief from the heat).

The genre is varied, the casts inevitably fine and justice almost always prevails. So here are 15 shows, new and old, to watch.

'Young Sherlock' (Prime Video)

Will we ever tire of reimagining Sherlock Holmes? Not anytime soon, apparently. Created by Matthew Parkhill and developed by Guy Ritchie (who directed two episodes), this version gives us a college-aged Sherlock (Hero Fiennes Tiffin) banished to the role of Oxford University porter by his fed-up older brother, Mycroft (Max Irons), who hopes to put the arrogant young rip on a steadier path. Alas, before you can say "Sir Bucephalus Hodge" (the Oxford bigwig played by Colin Firth), young Sherlock is up to his flat cap in murder and mystery, which he is determined to solve with the aid of his new best bud – wait for it – James Moriarty (Dónal Finn). An over-the-top romp that proves, if nothing else, the near-miraculous elasticity of Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic creation.

'Bookish' (PBS)

Speaking of Holmes, "Sherlock" co-creator and co-star Mark Gatiss is up to it again, this time in the leading role. In post-World War II London, Gabriel Book (Gatiss) runs a secondhand bookshop, above which he and his beloved wife, Trottie (Polly Walker), live. But all is not what it seems, as Jack (Connor Finch), the young orphan ex-con they take under their wing, soon discovers. Gabriel apparently did something so important during the war that he is now the neighborhood's go-to crime solver (with a letter from Winston Churchill to ensure VIP access). He also has a personal stake in Jack's reclamation, which gives the series a fascinating and pathos-filled LGBTQ-history subtext.

'Grantchester' (PBS)

The sacred meets the secular in this long-running pairing of a young vicar with a worldly police detective in the titular idyllic Cambridgeshire village during the 1950s and '60s. In Seasons 1-4, that vicar is Sidney Chambers (James Norton), a jazz enthusiast plagued by memories of WWII who offers unsolicited insights to gruff and initially ungrateful Det. Inspector Geordie Keating (Robson Green). Friendship inevitably blooms, and when Sidney leaves the scene (and Norton the series) at the end of Season 4, many hearts (including Geordie's) are broken. But subsequent replacement vicars – Will Davenport (Tom Brittney) in Seasons 5-9 and Alphy Kotteram (Rishi Nair) in Seasons 9-11 – each find their way to Geordie's side, bringing their own charms, detectival insights and personal woes. The final season premieres June 14.

'Touching Evil' (BritBox)

DI Dave Creegan (a young Robson Green) is brought in to help DI Susan Taylor (an even younger Nicola Walker) of the Organized and Serial Crime Unit solve a series of abductions that Creegan comes to believe have been committed by a serial killer. The relationship sticks and the pair goes on to track down all manner of nasty killers with a combination of unconventional techniques and good police work. Green's Creegan gets top billing, and a deeply resonant personal story, but seeing Walker (who would go on to star in so many fine series, including the terrific crime dramas "River" and "Unforgotten") play a finely tuned second fiddle is great fun too.

'Karen Pirie' (BritBox)

For fans of Scottish crime drama (see also "Case Histories," "Shetland" and "Dept. Q"), Det. Inspector Karen Pirie ("Outlander's" Lauren Lyle) is a refreshing historic cases hero. Smart, ambitious and dogged, she is not burdened by a dark past or traumatic pain or the generally dour outlook that plague so many of her peers. Based on the books of Val McDermid, the series is set on the Scottish peninsula of Fife (the first season involves the picturesque town of St. Andrews) and all the gloriously broody scenery that implies. Murder mystery plus vicarious international mini-break.

'Sister Boniface Mysteries' (BritBox)

This cheeky spinoff of the iconic "Father Brown" puts a sweet-faced Catholic nun (Lorna Watson) at the center of all manner of murder in the fictional 1960s Cotswolds town of Great Slaughter. Sister Boniface is, of course, not just any nun. Having served as a codebreaker at Bletchley Park during WWII before entering the convent, she holds a PhD in chemistry, which makes her the perfect, if most unlikely, forensic specialist. (She also rides a red Vespa and serves as the convent's vintner.) Unflappably brilliant and sincere in her vocation, she proves that faith in action can be both serious and great fun to watch.

'The Bletchley Circle' (BritBox)

Like Sister Boniface, Susan Grey (Anna Maxwell Martin) served her country as a codebreaker, but she is finding post-WWII life a bit more, well, boring. Forced back into the traditional roles of wife and mother, Susan tries to make do until a series of murders suggests to her a pattern unnoticed by the police. Gathering her former and still formidable colleagues who are also languishing in a sexist world, she creates, for two marvelous seasons, her own private crime unit. (See also, the one-season spinoff, "The Bletchley Circle: San Francisco.")

'Sherwood' (BritBox)

When truculent Gary Jackson (Alun Armstrong) is murdered by an arrow outside his home in Nottinghamshire, near Sherwood Forest, Det. Chief Supt. Ian St. Clair (David Morrissey) is quick to put down any Robin Hood references and look instead at the town's 30-year-old but still roiling divisions over the U.K.'s 1984-85 miners' strike. Based on real events, "Sherwood" is both a murder mystery and a contemplation of the damage done by class-based strife and longheld grudges, often based on misinformation. With an incredible cast, including Lesley Manville, Kevin Doyle and Lorraine Ashbourne, it is deeply moving drama that illuminates the personal price of social divisions. Season 3 premieres this year.

'Magpie Murders' (PBS)

Season 3 of "Magpie Murders" – titled "Marble Hall Murders" – is also set to bow this year, so now is a good time to catch up on the previous adaptations of Anthony Horowitz's Susan Ryeland novels, which both satirize and honor the murder-mystery genre. Ryeland (Lesley Manville) is a book editor whose most famous – and tiresome – author, Alan Conway (Conleth Hill), has just turned in his final murder mystery called "Magpie Murders." Only the last chapter is missing and Conway has just been found dead at his country home. So it's up to Ryeland, working with Conway's literary detective Atticus Pünd (Tim McMullan), to figure out what happened, both in real life and in the book. This mystery-within-a-mystery launches two vivid characters, Ryeland and Pünd, working separately and together to solve crimes, sometimes in two different timelines.

'The Inspector Lynley Mysteries' (BritBox)

The many, and voluminous, novels of Elizabeth George are being adapted in "Lynley," a new series that has its charms. Still, I'm sticking with the older version, which ran from 2001 to 2008. Over six seasons, the unlikely partnership of Det. Inspector Thomas Lynley, eighth earl of Asherton and generally natty guy played by Nathaniel Parker, and his distinctly working-class and perpetually disheveled sergeant, Barbara Havers (Sharon Small), creates a classic odd-couple mix that allows some actual insight into issues of class and gender. But mostly, they make a great detective team, often using their differences to their advantage. The mysteries range far and wide over the U.K., from gritty streets to posh country homes, and 24 90-minute episodes are enough to keep you going all summer long.

'Cadfael' (BritBox)

Though the oldest series on this list (1994-1998), "Cadfael," based on the books of Ellis Peters, remains a classic and constant recommendation. The great Derek Jacobi plays the titular 12th century monk who was once a soldier of the Crusades. Now a botanist and apothecary, Cadfael aids the local sheriff in solving all manner of crimes committed in and near Shrewsbury Abbey during England's 15-year civil war known now as the Anarchy. Though the series does not delve as deeply into the politics of the time as the novels do, it creates an uncertain world in which violence runs rampant. Mercifully, there is a monk who knows his stuff, and if Jacobi isn't enough reason to watch, the costumes and landscape are pretty great too.

'No Offence' (BritBox)

Joanna Scanlan was punk rock long before her turn in "Riot Women," especially as the wildly frank, slightly raunchy, take-no-prisoners DI Viv Deering in this blackly funny depiction of the wayward Friday Street division of the Manchester Police. They are not misfits exactly – Deering knows what she's doing as does her team, including the ambitious Det. Constable Dinah Kowalski (Elaine Cassidy), the self-doubting Det. Sgt. Joy Freers (Alexandra Roach) and Paul Ritter's wise-cracking Randolph Miller (OK, maybe he is a misfit) – but they are much more recognizably human than most TV coppers. We know they'll get their man, but it will take some time, and more than a few hilarious and heartbreaking misfires.

'Inspector George Gently' (Acorn TV)

After the murder of his wife, Inspector George Gently (Martin Shaw) leaves London's Metropolitan police force in search of a more peaceful life in 1960s Northumberland. But as anyone who has seen "Vera" could tell him, Newcastle Upon Tyne is far from peaceful. Still brokenhearted, Gently finds himself solving crimes, and trying to teach his sergeant John Bacchus (Lee Ingleby) to be an honorable man in a time of shifting social mores and political upset.

'Whitechapel' (Hulu)

Come for the Jack the Ripper overtones, stay for the always great character actor Phil Davis ("Trying," "Vera Drake"). He plays old-school Det. Sgt. Ray Miles, a member of an East End squad that is less than thrilled by their new guy, opposite the smooth and ambitious Det. Inspector Joseph Chandler (Rupert Penry-Jones), who shows up to his first crime scene in a tux and doesn't appear to understand that this is the East End. But with what seems like a Ripper copycat on the loose, everyone needs to put aside their preconceived notions and figure out what's going on. The series is wildly atmospheric with plenty of gallows humor and more than a few truly loopy plotlines, but great fun with Davis managing, as ever, to sell even the most preposterous scene.

Death Comes to Pemberley (PBS)

This adaptation of P.D. James' sequel to "Pride and Prejudice" is a miniseries, and just three episodes long, so this might be a bit of a cheat. But if you haven't seen it, you should. Elizabeth Darcy (nee Bennet) (Anna Maxwell Martin) and Fitzwilliam Darcy (Matthew Rhys) are happily married and planning a ball. Sure, a couple of servants see a ghost in the woods (where Elizabeth encounters a suspicious woman), and Col. Fitzwilliam (Tom Ward) clearly wants to marry Georgiana (Eleanor Tomlinson), who doesn't seem too keen, but what of it? Then Elizabeth's sister Lydia (Jenna Coleman) shows up uninvited and hysterical; her still-caddish husband, George Wickham (Matthew Goode), had an argument with his friend Capt. Denny (Tom Canton), and the two vanished into the woods where shots were subsequently heard. Once again, Mr. Darcy must do what he can to protect the dreaded Wickham, and in doing so all manner of secrets are revealed. Jane Austen meets Agatha Christie with a cast either writer would kill for.

MOVIE REVIEW

Niko Tavernise / Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment / TNS

Emily Blunt, left, and Josh O'Connor in "Disclosure Day."

The truth is out there in *'Disclosure Day'*

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

> **'Disclosure Day'**
>
> ★★★ ½
>
> **MPA rating:** PG-13 (for action/violence, some bloody images and strong language)
>
> **Running time:** 2:25
>
> **How to watch:** In theaters

Perhaps Emily Blunt is a supreme being (if you've seen her performances in "The Devil Wears Prada" movies, you might be inclined to agree). This is the supposition that legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg brings to the table in his latest movie about extraterrestrials, "Disclosure Day," a film that would make Fox Mulder jump for joy — or at least feel really vindicated. The truth is out there, Spielberg asserts, and maybe it doesn't have to be so scary.

Getting there might be, though. Spielberg wrote the story while screenwriter David Koepp crafts a 1970s-style paranoid thriller about the lengths that some people will go to to conceal evidence of extraterrestrial life, and the even further lengths that others will go to in order to reveal the truth about whether or not we're really alone. Spielberg plunks us right into the action with all the grace of a boot to the face.

But there's no better guide through a cinematic whirlpool. He and cinematographer Janusz Kaminski are at the height of their filmmaking powers in "Disclosure Day," with breathtaking camera movements that relentlessly push, pull, spin, float and twist our perspective upside down, and yet the objective always remains clear. We drop in with our hero, a cybersecurity expert and whistleblower, Daniel Kellner (Josh O'Connor), as he's attempting to evade a team of elite thugs from his former employer, Wardex, while spiriting away a backpack full of incriminating video evidence going back 79 years – as well as a powerful alien tool.

Yes, "Disclosure Day" is "thingamajig cinema" of the highest order – you know, when a movie is about different people trying to get one little, well, thingamajig (virus, bomb, list, etc.)? It's that. Spielberg and Koepp aren't trying to shy away from or reinvent genre tropes here. Koepp's screenplay is sturdy but in some places thin, even implausible, but Spielberg gives us the old razzle-dazzle to cover that up.

Spielberg is having a blast with this energetic yarn. Things do get pretty woo-woo and out there, so genre and familiar storytelling beats provide a grounding element and link to cinema history. Just when you thought every filmmaker had already shown us every possible kind of danger on a train, dating back to "The Perils of Pauline," Spielberg goes and invents a new one. In fairness, he did tell us that this was his thing in "The Fabelmans," and there's a real sense of joy and playfulness in the bravura filmmaking of "Disclosure Day."

With his cast, Spielberg has assembled an ensemble of heavy hitters who are simply the right people for the job. O'Connor is already so affable and lovable, we're immediately on his side, as is Eve Hewson, who plays his loyal but vulnerable girlfriend Jane, a former novitiate who grapples with her faith. Hot on Daniel's heels is the team from Wardex, led by scheming CEO Noah Scanlon (Colin Firth), who puts his stentorian authority into playing against type. Also trying to retrieve Daniel is Hugo Wakefield (Colman Domingo), a Wardex director-gone-rogue, now leading the mission to disclose the extraterrestrial information. If you want someone to deliver a sermon of righteous integrity, Domingo is your man.

Then there's Blunt, who has no equal when it comes to embodying barely managed chaos with varying shades of mania. She turns in an otherworldly performance among this all-star ensemble as Margaret, a perky weather girl in Kansas City, who suddenly starts speaking in unfamiliar languages (Russian and Korean), and then transmits an entirely inhuman set of clicks and growls while live on the air. She rapidly develops intense psychic powers that direct her to Daniel, otherwise a stranger to her.

Any further details should remain undisclosed, but the film is totally Spielbergian, as an action-packed and deeply humanist genre film. He's also – as he's conspiracy-theorizing about aliens and allowing O'Connor to crash a car into a house – commenting on cinematic storytelling. In "Disclosure Day," nostalgia is a portal, the eyes are the window to the soul, and seeing is believing. Spielberg and Koepp argue that there's nothing more powerful than visual evidence, but also that truly seeing others is the only way to forge empathy, a highly evolved trait. Spielberg might be making an alien movie, but he's telling us about ourselves, and about himself, at the same time.

The first half of "Disclosure Day" is ominous and unknowable, the second half is where Spielberg lets his earnestness shine, evoking childlike awe and wonder. But the climax is unfortunately anti-climatic, as the film builds to a whirling crescendo of stratospheric concepts and rattling energy that he chooses not to satisfyingly pay off. Spielberg and Koepp dive into the spiritual and the existential with this political alien flick, and while the destination isn't as exciting, the journey itself is deeply moving and brilliantly executed.

SERIES REVIEW

'Cape Fear' reinvents itself again with chilling, charming Javier Bardem

By ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

> **'Cape Fear'**
>
> **Rating:** TV-MA
>
> **How to watch:** On Apple TV

Apple TV / TNS

Javier Bardem in a scene from "Cape Fear."

"Cape Fear," premiering Friday on Apple TV, is a 10-episode limited series remake of a 1991 Martin Scorsese remake of a 1962 film adapted from John D. MacDonald's 1957 novel "The Executioners," and as in a game of telephone each subsequent version adds new material and moves a little farther from the original. (The credits to the series, created by Nick Antosca, note all previous sources and screenwriters.) Thirty-four years having passed since the last go-round, we are treated to such modern advances as catfishing, drones, deep fakes, social media and pushy true-crime podcasters.

In each iteration, a family is menaced by a recently released ex-con who blames one or more of them for his incarceration. Antosca fills his extra-long take on the material with complications and inventions; though the series is also chock full of borrowings from and allusions to its predecessors – you can hardly call them Easter eggs, lying there as they do in plain sight. (And sound: Bernard Herrmann and Elmer Bernstein's earlier scores share space with Jeff Russo's new one.)

In every version, the antagonist is a now-charming, now-menacing psychopath named Max Cady (Javier Bardem), memorably played by Robert Mitchum in 1962 and Robert De Niro in 1991. In the novel and movies, Cady was serving time for rape; here it's for the murder of his wife and unborn child, when new evidence suddenly springs him from prison after 17 years. We are invited to suspect this evidence from the very beginning, though this suspicion will itself become suspect. "Or is it?" is a question you'll be prompted to ask through the series.

The objects of Cady's slow-boiling vengeance – seemingly – are married lawyers Tom (Patrick Wilson) and Anna Bowden (Amy Adams), sharing the position previously represented solely by Gregory Peck and Nick Nolte in turn. Anna, who had unsuccessfully represented Cady, ironically works for an Innocence Project-type nonprofit, whose chief, Noa Toussaint (CCH Pounder), is only too delighted to fundraise on the back of Cady's celebrity. Cady, claiming no hard feelings, insinuates himself into their world, apparently friendly, apparently helpful, so that it's not always clear what's sincere and what's strategy. Is he a wolf in sheep's clothing, or just a creepy, sometimes violent sheep? ("Killed his wife, didn't kill his wife," a minor character will volunteer, "he's an arrogant bastard either way.")

There are now two Bowden children in the picture, doubling earlier versions. Natalie (Lily Collias), Anna's daughter from a previous relationship, is a good girl looking to go just a little bad, who feels unseen by her busy parents. Sad, sullen younger half-brother Zach (Joe Anders), unrecovered from a social media misstep, is acting more strangely than teenage boys usually do.

This is a cat and mouse – or cats and mice – melodrama, with customized stock characters given dark secrets and backstory traumas less as explanation than complication. (Good, bad, whatever, everyone's got issues.) Cady, who has a prison-acquired brain injury – cue flashback, in black and white, naturally – suffers from headaches and hallucinations, reacting painfully to flashbulbs (a Chekov gun, I wondered?), seeing visions of his dead wife and son, whom he pictures grown. (He is sad about it, whether or not it's his fault.) And is that masked woman in green he keeps seeing real or imagined?

On a nuts and bolts level, it's all screwed together tight, even the pieces that stick out at weird angles. (Is there a reason to make Cady an apparently talented chef, other than to demonstrate his knife skills?) The actors fill their parts with feeling. Bardem gets the most, and most extreme attitudes, to play, whether cozying up individually to the Bowdens, threatening a groupie, undergoing a religious conversion, acting normal or being weird. Adams is low-key forceful as his primary opponent. (Tom's comparatively weak character is underscored by his secret habit of microdosing LSD and a nothingburger flirtation with a colleague.) Collias is impressively real. The dialogue is well-crafted, the Southern atmosphere (Atlanta doubling Savannah, with Savannah here and there standing for itself) suitably oppressive.

Nevertheless, it's fair to ask whether this story, even with its yards of extra material, could be told in under nine hours? The answer, most assuredly, is yes. And might it be better shorter? It might.

Not that I've ever been a fly on the walls of the executive conference or dining or washrooms where such deals are made, but I suspect the length has less to do with artistic necessity than A) the obscure economics of streaming and B) the not unrelated habits of viewers, who, to judge by questions I get asked, abhor a vacuum. A 10-episode series will put off the moment when they have "nothing to watch," while the streamer gets to keep them in the ecosystem longer. "Cape Fear" is hardly the only series to which this applies. As I imagine the series will do well – mystery with a smattering of horror seems very much what the people want – more may be just the ticket for some people. Still, there's a sense that the story has expanded to fill the space, with plotlines for all and crazy side trips (snakes! drugs!) in escalating levels of nuttiness.

That might be more feature than bug, but I can't say I felt much of anything for the characters, or was concerned whether the Bowdens would emerge from their ordeals a stronger family. (Whatever the outcome, I'd say they have work to do.) Having been given only eight of 10 episodes to review, I'm interested, in a disinterested way, how this all will shake out, when the story finally moves to the Cape Fear River, and whatever final twists – that there will be twists, I am certain – an inevitably Action Packed Finale has in store.

Jason Koerner / Getty Images for Audacy / TNS

Jim Adkins of Jimmy Eat World performs on stage during Audacy Beach Festival at Fort Lauderdale Beach on Dec. 3, 2022, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Jimmy Eat World's Jim Adkins on 'Bleed American' turning 25

By ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News (TNS)

DETROIT — Jim Adkins took "The Middle" all the way to the top.

The Jimmy Eat World frontman is still marveling at the success of "Bleed American," the Arizona rock band's fourth album, which was released in July 2001.

The album – which the band retitled "Jimmy Eat World" in late 2001 after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and became "Bleed American" once again following its 2008 rerelease – sold over 1 million copies and became a genre-defining emo classic, while the video for "The Middle" became a hit on MTV's "TRL," positioning the band alongside Destiny's Child, NSYNC, Britney Spears and other hitmakers of the day.

Now the band – singer Adkins, guitarist Tom Linton, bassist Rick Burch and drummer Zach Lind – is hitting the road to celebrate the album's 25th anniversary.

We talked to Adkins, 50, on the phone from his Phoenix home about the tour and album. (Note: Questions and answers have been slightly edited for purposes of clarity.)

Q: You guys are getting ready to launch the "Bleed American" 25th anniversary tour. At the shows, are you playing the album front-to-back, or will you be playing the full album over the course of the night?

A: We're going to play the album as an album. You know, it's not exactly the way we would structure a live set with the way the dynamics of the "Bleed American" material goes, but I think it's sort of cool to hear it as it was presented. Which, you know, that alone makes it a little bit different to hear it that way.

Q: What does "Bleed American" mean to you and the band now, what did it mean then, and how has that relationship changed over the last 25 years?

A: Where it started was we were just proud of what we felt was our best work to date. We'd had enough experience putting out albums that we felt that's what you can count on, and all other expectations you've got to let go of. Like, are you proud of the work you just did? Then enjoy that, because that's all you know you've got coming to you. Nothing else is guaranteed. I had no idea what was about to happen, that's where our head space was. But if you're putting something out that you feel proud of, just let that be enough. Because really, this whole thing is about challenging yourself and feeling a sense of reward personally from playing music and making music. If you don't have that, you're going to be miserable. And I feel that a listener is going to hear that misery, and that's going to be a turn-off. So if you're not excited about it, no one else is going to be buying it. Not everybody's gonna buy it, but the right people will if you're just honest with yourself about you liking it. And it's funny, if you can nail that, then you can do this forever. The scale of doing it is not up to you, but if you have that personal sense of reward, you can always be doing music in some capacity.

Q: You mentioned you had no idea what was about to happen. When did you realize this album was a very big deal?

A: Maybe sometime in like 2011, I just realized, like, it was a big deal.

Q: It took it 10 years?

A: Yeah. (Laughs.) I was just sort of like, "Oh, huh. I guess I'm just doing this now." Seriously, I still don't really believe it, you know? I'm still kind of wondering what I'm gonna do when I grow up, or what my major might be if I have to go back to school. I'm not kidding! It can go away at any moment, the world can change, and the things that I like to do and I find rewarding, maybe no one else is into anymore. And so I guess something that I've had to really learn over the years, since it came out, is how to savor that. I wasn't really good at savoring it in the moment when "Bleed American" was on its rise, you know? Because we were doing nine-band punk gigs in basements, and then we're doing late-night TV. Like, what? It's so unreal. And I wasn't savoring any of that, because it's just bizarre. I wasn't taking any of it in. And now I think it's important to savor even the small things that come our way. I feel like that's exactly what you need to do to keep doing it. So going into this tour, 25 years later, we are appreciating this, we are commemorating this, we are acknowledging the passage of time and what this thing has meant to us.

Q: Is that how this tour came to be, or was it because the anniversary was a nice round number and it was like, "hey, let's go do this?"

A: It's all of that, you know? I remember reading where (filmmaker) Jem Cohen was being interviewed about his Fugazi documentary, "Instrument," and I could be getting this wrong, but I have a memory of the guys from Fugazi saying one of the reasons they wanted to let him make the film was they realized they're not gonna be able to play like this forever. (Laughs.) And I feel like I don't know what's gonna happen. It's been 25 years. We're like the Mars Rover, man; we have gone so far beyond what anyone would have expected or would have been realistic that we would have lasted. But selfishly, we didn't get to be fully present and savor it when it was going on. And right now, it's like it's bigger than it was then, in a weird way. And we have 25 years of experience performing music now. You know, the stuff we felt was out of reach to really do or might have been a compromise to try to do back then, we can do that now. So for us, it's about presenting that material with everything that we know about performing music and us as a working band, the ability to savor that, and the ability to savor that with the people that have found a connection to it.

Q: There's that line in the second chorus of "If You Don't, Don't" where you say "I need this now more than I ever did, did." All these years of performing that song, do you always make sure to hit that double "did" every night?

A: I do. Part of that song is the wordiness of it, and just leaning into that. It's a yes, and to what the song was trying to say to me, and the line after that I say twice instead of once, which happens before that. So the song was just telling me to do that, so I did it.

Q: There's a section on "A Praise Chorus" where you quote lyrics from "Crimson and Clover," "Kickstart My Heart" and a few other songs. Did you end up having to split the royalties on the record because of that? Did lawyers get involved, or was it just like a handshake deal and everyone looked the other way?

A: Our manager represents the Beastie Boys, so they knew you have to ask about that stuff before you use it. Because of the sample culture in the hip-hop world it was like, "you really should mention that to people before you start putting it out there." So we contacted everybody about it, and they were all cool with whatever. So we just thanked them, basically.

Q: Where does "A Praise Chorus" fall in your rankings of the record, or in the collected works of Jimmy Eat World?

A: I mean, it's an important one. It really just celebrates that period of the band in a way that I don't think any other song of ours does. It's self-aware of exactly where it is. It's a time capsule to a very specific place, but the theme of it you can tap into, and you should remember to tap into, and that's adventure. Exploring the unknown, things feeling new for the first time, and deciding to jump into that head first. If you're doing this whole life thing right, that doesn't have to end. And the feeling of what that was like when that song was written, knowing you can never get that again. But it's a reminder that you can still get that: It's not going to be in the same place, and that means you've got to summon the courage to look for new places to dive in all the time, and there's always a reward for that, too.

Q: Take the "Sliding Doors" version of your life and say this record doesn't happen, it doesn't hit the way it does. Are you back at college, and if so, what are you studying? Have you ever imagined the path where "Bleed American" had not done what it did?

A: My best guess would be that I would have stayed in college and tried to graduate with a degree in journalism, and then four years later I would have been completely out of a job when the internet explodes. Beyond that, I don't know where it goes.

Q: What type of journalism? Environmental, political? Would you have been doing record reviews?

A: Photojournalism, actually. I was really into fine art photography, and I felt like I was trying to be sensible, which is really funny, but it's such a gamble and you have no idea if you can really support yourself doing that. So I felt like photojournalism would have been the way that would have married a passion with a realistic career. Eugene Richards is a photographer that I thought like, oh man, he's doing it. It's fine art photography that's telling the story in a really gnarly way and I felt like, okay, that would be rad.

Q: What songs from the record have you played the least over the years?

A: "Cautioners" and "My Sundown" are the two that have probably been played the least. When you're structuring a live set, you really only have so much room for a particular mood, and there's a bunch of songs we have that might fit in that category, and those two songs, they don't always win out in the battle of what you're doing when you're making a set list.

Q: What happens with you guys and "Bleed American" after you wrap this tour? Do you do this again at 30? Or is this a special recognition that you'll preserve it in amber, in a sense?

A: That's how I'm approaching it. There's really no plans to continue this beyond the gigs we have set up for this year. I think that would make it less special, and I want to protect that. So yeah, this is it. We're not gonna do this again.

Q: For the album, right, not for the band?

A: Yeah, yeah. And probably for any album anniversary thing, this is probably it for us. There might be like an occasional one-off thing where we play a record, but it would have to be a special occasion. I don't think we could do a tour like this again, and I don't think we're going to do all "Bleed American" again after this tour. You might hear a lot of the songs at any particular gig. But you know, we do have other material we'd like to play for people, too.

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

Portable air conditioner

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

For whatever reason, you might need a portable air conditioner: your central system goes out, you need cooling in a space that is without AC, or you don't want to cool the entire house and instead just cool the room where you sleep. If so, the **Zafro 16,000 BTU portable air conditioner** can be a practical solution.

My experience with AC units consists of calling a professional for installation and service, except for a window unit, which installs in minutes. With the Zafro dual-hose inverter portable air conditioner ($579.99 at Amazon), you not only get a lot more cooling power, but the installation is easier than popping one in a bedroom window.

It has a four-way airflow system and uses environmentally friendly R32 refrigerant. Inside is a full DC inverter system, including a variable-speed dual-cylinder compressor and brushless DC motor.

My first thought before testing it was that it was going to be too loud. Far from it; I was amazed at how quiet it is. Zafro states the noise level is as low as 38 dB in sleep mode. 360-degree caster wheels are on the bottom of the white 14.25 by 16.5 by 27.2 inches, 55.68-pound unit. Using it in a closed master bedroom for a week, as well as an open family room of about 600 square feet, the Zafro 16,000 BTU portable air conditioner was impressive.

The cooling capacity is 16,000 BTU, the temperature range is 61 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit, and the energy efficiency is CEER up to 12.8, which Zafro states consumes significantly less power than traditional fixed-speed portable air conditioners.

The tool-free setup is easy since there is no permanent installation or HVAC work needed. The main part of the installation is connecting the exhaust hoses to the window panels using the included window adapter kit. Butterfly bolts connect and secure the panels for an airtight fit. Once the panels are properly sized, insert non-adhesive sealing foam to fill any gaps to create a complete seal between the panels and the window frame.

The butterfly bolts also make it easy to fine-tune the fit for maximum tightness. Finally, attach the exhaust hose to the window panel, press the latch to lock it in place, and connect the other end to the Zafro AC unit.

You can control the AC with the unit's onboard controls, a remote, voice commands with Alexa and Google Home, or the Zafro app. The LED display and control panel have everything you need for the on/off, modes (cool, dry, fan, sleep, extra, eco), temperature, timers, and a child lock. There's also a handy reminder to clean the air filter. To clean the filter, just hose it off.

The unit will also need to be drained from time to time, as explained in a simple graphic in the quick start guide. It can run for up to three full days before it needs to be drained.

zafroshop.com

Dreo's **TurboPoly Fan 765S** 2-in-1 is a versatile fan that's perfect for circulating air throughout your home.

It can be used as a pedestal/floor fan, extending from 39 inches up to 44 inches. And in seconds, it can be converted to a desktop/nightstand fan measuring 19.3 inches tall. Whichever way you use it, airflow will increase instantly. With or without air conditioning, a fan will help you feel cooler and more comfortable.

The TurboPoly Fan 765S ($159.99) features Motion-Sync Intelligent 3D Airflow, six airflow modes, including a customized sleep mode, and 12 airflow speeds. With a maximum air reach of 120 feet, it will oscillate 100 degrees vertically and 150 degrees horizontally. The operating sound is rated at HyperSilent 20 dB.

Everything is controlled with the included glow-in-the-dark wireless remote or the Dreo companion app. A small display in the front center of the grille displays the settings. With an airflow rate of up to 15,000 cubic feet per minute, dirt and dust can build up, so it needs cleaning from time to time. The TurboPoly Fan 765S is designed to be easy to clean, starting with taking off the front grille.

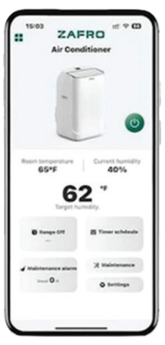
Another choice is the higher-end **Dreo TurboPoly Fan 704S** ($149.99) pedestal fan, with 1400 CFM airflow that reaches up to 110 feet.

The 704S delivers quiet, whole-room airflow in a stylish design, featuring an adjustable steel base from 37.5 to 43 inches and omni-directional oscillation. With dual-axis oscillation, it can rotate up to 150 degrees horizontally and 120 degrees vertically. Using the wireless remote, the Dreo mobile app, or voice controls (Alexa and Google Assistant), you can control up to 9 speeds across 6 wind modes. A built-in display on the fan shows the current settings.

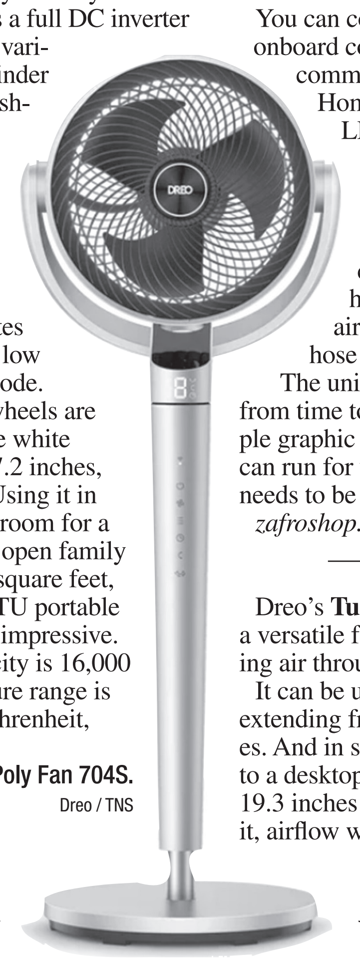
Inside is an optimized brushless DC motor producing the airflow. It also has a quiet sleep mode, with a noise level as low as 20dB. Cleaning it is also easy, removing the grill and blades.

https://www.dreo.com/products/turbopoly-fan-765s

Contact Gregg Ellman at gregg ellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.



The Zafro 16,000 BTU Portable AC.
Zafro / TNS



The Dreo TurboPoly Fan 704S.
Dreo / TNS

The Dreo TurboPoly Fan 765S.
Dreo / TNS

SOUND ADVICE

Positive buzz warranted for **EarFun Clip 2 earbuds**

By DON LINDICH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Q. I have a pair of EarFun OpenJump open earphones and they are functionally excellent, but they bug the top of my ear (where they sit) after about an hour. I then got the EarFun Clip open earbuds and I have been using them for almost a year now. They are the most comfortable earbuds I have ever used, and I have been through several! They are so light and comfortable on my ears, and the way they integrate with my workstation and my phone is remarkable. It connects to both of them and manages phone calls when I am watching YouTube TV on my workstation, pausing the video stream. Have you tried the EarFun Clip yet?

– S.E., San Jose, California

A. I have tried both the EarFun OpenJump and the most recent version of your EarFun Clip, the EarFun Clip 2. The OpenJump was one of the more popular earphones I reviewed last year and many readers wrote back to me praising them, especially those who are active. They enjoyed how the OpenJump would clip securely on their ear and provide excellent sound quality for music, media and phone calls whether at the gym, in the park or around the house. The open design allows you to enjoy your audio without being isolated from the outside world, and the sound is competitive with earphones that seal off the ear canal. It's like having your cake and eating it too, and yours was the only response I received in the year since I covered the OpenJump that expressed less than total satisfaction.

That response is serving a purpose today to introduce readers to the Clip series because as good as the OpenJump is, the Clip 2 is even better and I can see why you are so pleased with the original Clip. I wrote about a charger I took to the Universal Orlando Resort last month, and that was not the only product I brought with me. One of the others was the EarFun Clip 2, and I came away as excited by it as you are with your original Clip. My own ears do not always cooperate with in-ear earbuds, and it can take a lot of experimenting to get a good fit. This often has me reaching for over-ear headphones to take to the gym, or to use when writing a column in a restaurant booth somewhere. The Clip 2 changed that. They are supremely comfortable and lightweight, and once placed on your ear they feel like they were meant to be there. The open design allows environmental sounds in while providing hi-fi sound quality that satisfies. They sound good when initially placed, but a little bit of rotating and adjusting provides notable improvements.

If that isn't enough, the Clip 2 can do face-to-face foreign language translation for over 100 languages in conjunction with the EarFun app. When someone speaks to you, it can translate in real time and you hear translated audio. Another way is they can speak, it will translate, and you can speak and it will translate for them. The days of the "Star Trek" universal translator are almost here!

The Clip 2 is quite an amazing product for the money and is racking up great reviews in the tech media as well as with end users, where it currently rates 4.8-4.9/5 everywhere I checked. They sell for $79.99 and the current code CLIP30 at myearfun.com reduces the price to only $49.99, one of the best deals of the year on such a satisfying, high-tech product. I hope this review finds some last-minute shoppers before Father's Day!

Contact Don Lindich at www.soundadvicenews.com and use the "submit question" link on that site.

Handout / Don Lindich / TNS

EarFun Clip 2.

Do TV apps become outdated?

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

This week's topic comes from a 71-year-old reader and it concerns TV.

"Do TVs need replacing because their software becomes outdated?" and "We have an antenna and sometimes (one local channel) pixelates and becomes unwatchable. How would I get that same channel without an antenna? I need a remote with number buttons, and I don't really like on-screen menus. I'd like a watching experience identical to watching antenna television (all the same shows)."

First question is specifically about smart TVs.

Yes, they can eventually age out.

Smart TVs have been around for more than a decade and it's up to the TV companies to keep the streaming apps, like Netflix, Prime Video, etc., up to date.

That 10+ year old hardware will eventually fall behind and not be compatible with updates.

Plus, TVs have come a long way and got a lot cheaper in the last decade. Do yourself a favor and spring for a new one. I can remember spending $1,200 for a 42-inch Panasonic plasma TV and now a very nice 55-inch 4K smart TV can be had for under $300.

As for the antenna, if you'd like to lose the antenna, but still receive local channels, you'll need a streaming service that includes locals.

There are a few options, like YouTube TV, Sling TV and DirecTV Stream.

The only one I know of that is close the same experience (like channel numbers) would be DirecTV Stream. In fact, if you have U-Verse, DirecTV Stream has all the same channel numbers.

You can watch DirecTV Stream on a smart TV or streaming box like Roku or Apple TV.

If you get one of the DirecTV streaming boxes, like the Gemini Air, you'll get a remote with actual number buttons, and you can avoid menu navigation. You just use the remote to tune to the channel by number.

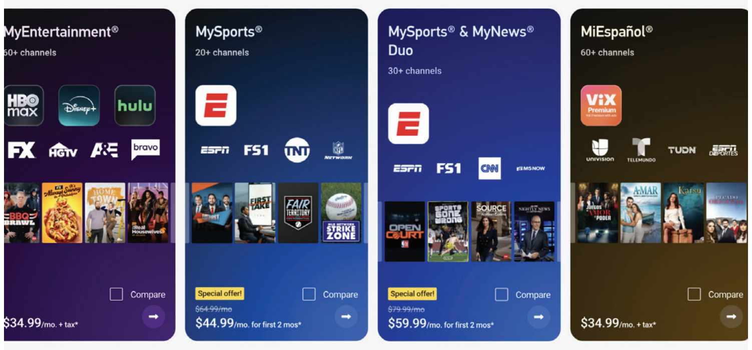
DirecTV packages include genre packs for sports or news, some of which include local channels. They also have larger bundles that start around $85 (plus taxes and fees).

One of the best features of streaming services is you don't sign a contract. If you subscribe and find you don't like it after a month or two, you can cancel and try something else.

I know this sounds like a paid ad for DirecTV Stream, but it's not. If you ask me for advice, you're going to get my honest recommendation.

The other streaming services are great, but DirecTV Stream is the most like traditional cable bundles for the viewer.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.



Jim Rossman / TNS

A screenshot showing a few of the genre packs offered by DirecTV Stream.

Color spectrum: yai112 via Getty Images
Phones: daboost via Getty images

Your phone screen doesn't have the same *color range* as the human eye

– and AI widens the gap between digital images and the real thing

By DOUGLAS GOODWIN
University of California, Los Angeles
The Conversation

A peacock feather in sunlight shifts from blue to green to bronze as you turn it. Photograph it, and this shimmer collapses into one angle, one exposure, one compromise.

A digital image is not a record of what your eye sees. The standard color space that most digital images use was built for an older display world, when cathode-ray tube monitors swept beams of electrons across phosphor-coated glass. This standard color space made color predictable across many devices, but the compromise was a narrower range of colors for screens, cameras and image files to share.

Whatever the screen offers feels complete. It is not that your eyes cannot see more; digital images give them less to work with.

I teach a class about color at the California Institute of the Arts called Plastics, Neon, and Psychedelia, which covers the many ways color is produced: by materials, by light, by screens and by the mind.

I also have a condition called deuteranomaly, which changes the way I discriminate color, though not in the way you might imagine. A deuteranomalous eye does not simply lose color distinctions – it remaps them.

Vision researchers in Cambridge showed in 2005 that deuteranomalous observers can reliably distinguish khakis and olives that look identical to people with standard color vision. I have mistaken a traffic light for an overhead streetlamp while driving at night, but my color vision is not a shrunken copy of ordinary vision: It is a different map of the same ground.

While my eyes leave some colors uncertain, they sharpen other distinctions. Screens impose another kind of limit, though more quietly: They organize color according to their own rules, then offer that version as complete. My eye and the screen are both maps that include and exclude differently. Mine trades some distinctions for others. The screen trades range for reliability. The question for any color system is not whether it is accurate but what it keeps.

From wild green to screen green

My neon pothos houseplant is so green that it seems to generate its own light. Photograph it with a smartphone and the result is fine: The leaves are green, the picture makes sense. But the green in the photograph is not the green on the plant.

Look at the photo. Look at the plant. Then look at the photo again. The photographed leaves are muted, but not evenly. Some greens flatten while others appear boosted, as if the phone were trying to compensate for what it cannot show. The leaves on the actual plant are electric. No phone I own, no printed page and no Instax print has captured that green, though the Instax comes closer.

Here is what happens. Light bounces off the pothos and strikes the phone's sensor, which records numbers representing the color the phone sensed. Each pixel is stored as a recipe for red, green and blue light: three values that tell a screen how much of each primary color to emit. In much of the image world, those numbers are still translated into sRGB, the default color space for ordinary digital images.

Color scientists map human color perception as a horseshoe-shaped field. A standard display space cuts a triangle from that horseshoe, enclosing only part of what the eye can see. A triangle's straight sides cannot follow the horseshoe's curve, so some colors always fall outside the display space.

Many modern screens can show more than sRGB, but sRGB remains the default format for ordinary digital images because it works reliably across devices and platforms. The pothos green is remapped to fit, and that remapped version is the picture you get. Screen green is not wild green.

Every medium translates color in its own way. Film does too, through chemistry, exposure, dyes and paper. The Instax print is not more accurate in any absolute sense, but it conveys the pothos differently. It reflects light from a surface rather than rebuilding color as light from a screen. The green feels denser, less flat and less removed from its source. The Instax still misses the plant's absolute color, but it misses it in a different way.

The phone's translation matters now because people see a thing's color on a screen before they meet it in the world.

When AI learns from limited colors

AI image generators do not simply inherit this color gap. They can amplify it. They are not trained on the plant in front of you. They are trained on other people's photographs of plants like it: millions of images already filtered through sensors, editing software, platform compression and the color limits described above. Many of the vivid greens were clipped or shifted before the model ever encountered them.

Ask an AI image model to generate a peacock feather and you will likely receive a competent image: the canonical eyespot, the dark pupil, the cyan ring, the gold, the magenta rim. The surviving colors are the ones the image world knows how to keep. What is missing is the iridescence.

In a real feather, the barbs can flash the same blue-green-bronze as the eyespot. A photograph fixes that shimmer to a single angle. The generated image flattens it further. Its barbs are muddy brown with faint metallic highlights. The model has learned the symbols of a peacock feather, but not the event of seeing one turn in the light.

Generative models make images from the patterns they find most often in their training images. They render ordinary brightness convincingly. The rarer effects are the ones that slip away: saturated colors, metallic flashes, structural glints. The model can still make an image that looks bright, even spectacular. But its brightness is screen-native, learned from other images on screens, not from seeing the subject itself.

The loop tightens with each pass. AI-generated images are uploaded, shared, indexed and may be folded into future training sets. When models train on material produced by earlier models, their outputs narrow over time. The rare colors are the first to go.

These images do not stay inside the machine. They can fill social media feeds and image searches until they stand in for the thing itself. The simulated green becomes the green you meet first.

Watching for the gap

Day after day, screens show you only the colors inside their range, translating anything outside that range into colors they can display. If you only ever see the beetle wing as a dull image, nothing tells you a brighter one ever existed. It will just look dull. If every picture of a plant arrives with its greens muted into the same screen-safe range, that range becomes green. You will not miss the absent colors.

One way to observe the gap is to find something vividly colored: a ripe persimmon, a peacock feather, the orange-pink at the bottom of the desert sky. Look at it before you photograph it. Stay with it. Stand close. Give it a name, even a private one. Then photograph it. Hold the image next to the thing. That distance is the gap.

The wild colors have not been erased. They have been excluded from the screen's territory. The version that travels is what gets remembered. The thing is still there. Look for it.

Douglas Goodwin is a lecturer in design and media arts at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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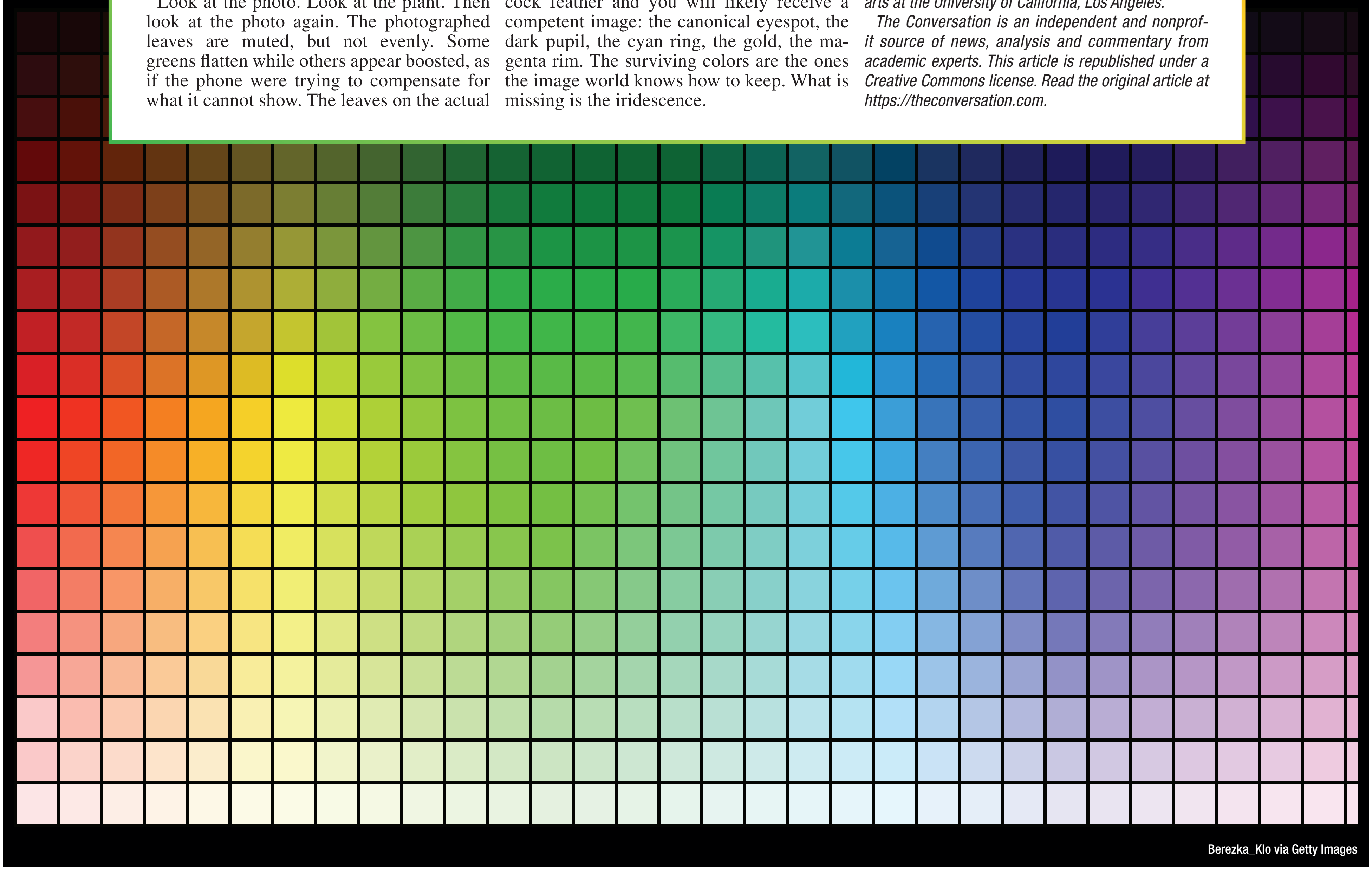

Berezka_Klo via Getty Images

FG Trade via Getty Images

Powerful AI is making facial recognition *better at identifying you*

By VIJAYAN ASARI
University of Dayton
The Conversation

If you are fortunate enough to have a ticket to an event at Madison Square Garden in New York – say, an NBA Finals game – one aspect of your visit will be having your face scanned by a facial recognition system.

Major event venues are increasingly using the technology. Some, like Madison Square Garden, use it for surveillance purposes, and some, like Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia, to offer visitors optional ticketless admission.

Adoption of facial recognition technology is increasing, becoming more prevalent in daily life, from public buses to public buildings. The Transportation Security Administration has deployed the latest facial recognition technology at security checkpoints at numerous airports. The agency says the new system will be used in cities across the U.S. that are hosting World Cup 2026 soccer matches.

The growing use of facial recognition has broadened concerns about accuracy and bias. But in my research studying facial recognition technology in the Vision Lab at the University of Dayton, I've found that advanced deep learning models have made face recognition systems more accurate and reliable. The AI models, trained on hundreds of millions of face images, are more than 99 percent accurate in controlled environments – settings such as cellphones, airports and border checkpoints.

Facial recognition basics

Facial recognition involves three steps: locate a face in an image or video frame, create a faceprint that catalogs salient features – including the shape of the face and landmark points such as eyes, nose and mouth – and record the texture of the skin. Then it compares the faceprint to those in a database, which may be inside a smartphone or at a bank or hospital, to verify a person's identity or allow access.

In the physical world, these systems are faster and simpler than requiring people to show IDs. In the online world, they are easier than entering a login name and password. Facial recognition also significantly reduces the possibility of forgery or fraud when compared with ID cards or passwords.

Improvements in the technology have come from a variety of research projects. FaceNet, a deep learning model developed by Google, has upgraded recognition of faces that are partly covered or hidden in images. DeepFace, a landmark AI-powered facial recognition system developed by Facebook AI Research, achieves the same high level of verification shown by humans.

PonyWang via Getty Images

THE CONVERSATION

NeoFace, a highly accurate AI-powered algorithm developed by NEC, is built into Mobile Fortify, the mobile facial recognition system used by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to identify people.

Reducing false positives and negatives

Real-world conditions such as poor lighting, difficult viewing angles, extreme facial expressions, concealment by face masks or sunglasses, and poor image quality can still hamper performance, leading to faulty identification. False positives and false negatives are the two primary errors. False positives are when a person is incorrectly matched to a different person in a database. False negatives are when an individual is not found in a database, even though their image exists there.

False positives are more critical in security and safety applications. They can lead to wrongful accusations, discrimination or detention. In 2025, a 50-year-old woman in Tennessee was arrested and put in jail for six months based on an AI-powered facial recognition system that incorrectly tied her to a North Dakota bank fraud investigation. False negatives may prompt authorities to deny services to people who qualify for them.

Accuracy can suffer if models are trained on data that does not reflect real-world demographics. A 2025 study showed that systems trained on public databases in which people with darker skin tones are lacking leads to lower recognition accuracy. This kind of unintentional bias in training data may lead to misidentification of women, people of color and young and old people. One report found that facial recognition systems used by 42 U.S. government agencies falsely identified African and Asian American faces 10 to 100 times more often than white faces, in some cases leading to wrongful arrests.

Accuracy also deteriorates when people are wearing heavy makeup and for young children and old people because their landmark features tend to change more quickly than adults of other ages. Balancing datasets by collecting more representative images across age, gender and ethnicity, and frequently updating databases, can improve accuracy and produce fairer results.

Adjusting images before they are sent for matching – for example, changing brightness levels – can improve accuracy, too. People squint their eyes when they are in dark or very bright light. Advanced processing software can mimic this human trait to improve the facial recognition system's ability to extract facial features from the image.

A full face from partial data

Humans are good at identifying a person even if part of their face is covered by sunglasses or a face mask. The brain assigns more significance to the exposed details. If facial recognition programs can learn to do the same, that would reduce false positives and false negatives, including when cameras only capture part of a face.

Facial dynamics can help, too. It may be difficult for someone to instantaneously recognize a middle school friend they haven't seen for many years, but if the old friend smiles, that change in expression can immediately improve recall.

Researchers are developing a facial recognition method for doing this, known as volumetric directional patterning. It captures the subtle movements of facial muscles, as well as eyelid blinks, in consecutive frames of a video. It tracks how facial landmarks shift over time, as well as the context in which a face is being observed, which can improve recognition accuracy.

Researchers are also creating more accurate AI-powered three-dimensional systems that can capture the precise geometry of a face, including features such as contours of the eye socket, nose and chin. This kind of work could lead to anti-spoofing techniques that prevent facial recognition systems from falling for fake faces that are generated by computers and their human operators.

Fewer mistaken identities

Setting aside questions of privacy and cybersecurity and lingering issues of bias, one thing is clear: Facial recognition technology is improving. And that promises fewer errors – and fewer of the serious consequences that come with them.

Vijayan Asari is a professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Dayton.

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HOME & GARDEN

Paneled walls are painted in a muted tone.
Scott Gabriel Morris / TNS

Bar cabinetry is painted in charcoal gray.

Handout / TNS
Black is the prominent color used for architectural details such as window trim, doors and railings.

DESIGN RECIPES

What's in and out with paint

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

When it comes to wall colors, some paint colors are in and some are simply out.

Designer choices for wall colors nowadays reflect a desire toward relaxed and modern living as opposed to "stuffy" and formal.

What's in

While moody colors may not be your favorite, charcoal gray and even black remain on trend. Considered modern and sleek, these colors work especially well when contrasted with wood finishes such as teak, birch, walnut and ash.

Use these deep colors throughout a space and then contrast with a white trim. If white feels too stark, consider painting trims and casings black to convey a modern, European vibe. Painting architectural elements such as banisters, railings, trims and casings black as opposed to white also works well.

What's out

There are a number of colors that many homeowners should avoid.

Stark white: White comes in various shades and undertones. Stark white such as the color of a pure white sheet or bright snow is often too sterile and sanitized for most homes. Instead opt for a classic white color with a slight hint of warmth.

Butter cream: Yellow and yellow-based tones are often hard to pair with other colors. These colors can also make a room feel dated. Instead of using a butter cream, select a version of taupe that is more natural and neutral to more mimic the color shade of linen, burlap or wheat.

Cranberry or red: There was a time when dark shades of red was popular especially in formal areas such as dining spaces and even entries. However, these colors are often considered to be overly personalized, dated and are difficult to paint over, often requiring multiple coats of primer and even repeated paint application.

Wall finish. How to decide?

There is often confusion when it comes to paint finishes. Choose the right finish and walls look smooth and silky. While the wrong finish can make walls look chalky or uneven. When looking to select the ideal wall finish. Here are some general tips:

Matte or satin finish: A matte or satin finish works well on new walls, while in older homes eggshell is often better as it is more forgiving when it comes to imperfections. In general, a matte or flat finish will create a smooth look on walls.

Eggshell finish: Looking for a specific finish to use in different areas of the home? In general eggshell should be used in high-traffic areas in which the need is for a paint to be wipeable, such as in a kitchen or bathroom.

Semi-gloss or high-gloss: A semi-gloss or high-gloss finish should be used on your architectural elements such as baseboards, trims, casings, banisters and railings.

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Should I hire movers or DIY my move?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

If you have a move coming up, you know one of the biggest decisions is whether you should hire movers or try to tackle the moving process yourself. Unfortunately, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to moving – your answer will depend on your budget, timeline, preferences and whether or not you have the physical ability to move your belongings.

Hiring movers can be a great option for people who don't have the time or ability to move themselves. Working with reputable, professional movers can make your move faster, more convenient and less stressful. Hiring movers is also a highly customizable process, allowing you to pick and choose which parts of the move you want to do yourself. For example, you can hire movers only for the loading and unloading process, or you can hire full-service movers to help with the entire moving process, from packing to loading and unloading to driving the moving truck. If you're short on time but watching your budget, consider hiring movers for one aspect of the move, but managing the rest of the move yourself.

Dreamstime / TNS
Hiring movers offers convenience, speed, and a hands-off experience, while moving yourself gives you more control and comes at a lower price point.

The main downside of hiring movers is the cost. Professional movers can be expensive, especially for long-distance moves. Moving costs can vary a lot depending on the company you go with, so I recommend reaching out to several companies to get in-person quotes before making your decision. If you want to save a little money when hiring movers, plan for a weekday move in the middle of the month. This will help you avoid peak pricing. Another downside is that movers may not know which items need extra care due to sentimental value. I recommend moving Grandma's china and other sentimental, fragile items yourself to be safe.

While hiring movers offers convenience and ease, DIYing your move also has its advantages. The main benefit is that moving yourself is much cheaper than hiring movers. Instead of paying for a moving company, you only need to rent a moving truck and pay for materials like boxes, tape, moving blankets, dollies and bubble wrap. DIYing your move can also give you full control over the moving process, allowing you to move at your own pace and ensure things are done exactly the way you want them.

If you go the DIY route, there are a few things you can do to make the moving process go as smoothly as possible. Start packing far in advance, label your boxes clearly and try to disassemble large furniture before moving day. You should also budget for the move ahead of time, keeping the cost of materials in mind so there are no surprises. If your friends and family are helping you move, make sure you confirm dates a few weeks ahead of time to avoid any last-minute changes.

Whether you plan on hiring movers or tackling the move yourself, the key is to plan ahead and know what you're getting yourself into. The more prepared you are, the smoother your move will be.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

Silver Beach in St. Joseph has a 2,450-foot beach of soft, white sand, a pier, playground, a carousel and is walkable to the downtown shops and restaurants.
Melody Baetens / The Detroit News / TNS

Community in Southwest Michigan is called the Hamptons of the Midwest

By MELODY BAETENS
The Detroit News (TNS)

BERRIEN COUNTY, Mich. — Sandy beaches, sunsets, wine trails, farm-fresh cuisine and a chance to be close to nature are all what draw folks from across the Great Lakes to Michigan's southwest communities.

The new hot phrase for the area is "the Hamptons of the Midwest," and it's catching on. Locals say the interest from Chicago and other out-of-state communities has been growing since the COVID pandemic, but there is plenty up the coast of Lake Michigan that has been attracting people for years.

When you visit, you can see the Chicago influence. The sports bars cheer on the Cubs and ice cream stands offer hot dogs not with chili and onions, but bright green relish and sport peppers. In spite of this, Chicago has award-winning cuisine and cocktails, and that high bar seems to be making a good impression.

"We really enjoy the community, the people, the food. It's really starting to build and scale into this really charming, unique getaway from larger metropolitan areas," said Justin Cohen, a former Chicago native who now calls the New Buffalo area home.

He and his wife, Jeana Anderson Cohen, are launching Petit Acres there this month. The 4.25-acre retreat has 12 private homes that can be rented out individually or all at once. The grounds are design-forward and aim to foster meaningful gathering and have a focus on "wellness," which is one of the fastest-growing factions of the travel industry. Conde Nast Traveler reports that the wellness travel market is expected to reach $1.4 trillion by next year.

"At the center of the Petit Acres is all about how people connect, how people are able to reset and experience nature," said Cohen.

The Cohens said picking the New Buffalo community – the larger area is referred to as Harbor Country – to grow their new venture was easy because of what it has and also what it doesn't have.

"The wine trail, the microbreweries, the food ... everyone we've met here is so collaborative and always willing to introduce you to the next person," said Cohen. "There's no gatekeeping here. There's no ego. It's really been fun to build here."

Here are more highlights that are drawing visitors and developers to southwestern Michigan.

Melody Baetens / The Detroit News / TNS
A complimentary building in downtown Three Oaks, a small downtown area in Southwest, Michigan, full of art, shops, restaurants and other entertainment destinations.

6 BIG REASONS TO VISIT SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN

Beaches

Silver Beach in St. Joseph is a great day out with a pier, sandy beach, playground and a splash pad, and it is walkable to the shops and restaurants in downtown St. Joseph. If a beach with a carousel isn't enough to make your twee heart flutter with sentimentality, the sunsets here will surely etch memories into your soul.

Further south, New Buffalo has sandy beachfront among its harbors and lakefront parks. You can rent kayaks and paddleboards nearby, or trek up the hill to the shops, bars and restaurants.

If you're lucky to find parking near Cherry Beach in between these two and have the mobility to traverse the wooden stairs, the quiet, secluded destination is worth it.

Warren Dunes State Park in Sawyer also has three miles of shoreline, plus hiking, picnicking and nearby camping.

Chef-driven restaurants

PostBoy, which is a short walk from New Buffalo Beach, is probably the newest chef-driven restaurant. Chef James Galbraith was long-listed for a James Beard Award for Best Chef: Great Lakes in PostBoy's first year, a notable feat.

About 20 minutes away, you have Granor Farm in Three Oaks, where culinary director Abra Berens and her team offer cooking classes, workshops and special dinners with guest chefs. It's as farm-to-table as it gets with the greenhouse dining room just 50 yards from the fields. There are also specific hours you can come and shop the farm store for fresh and certified organic produce, herbs and flowers, and take a self-guided tour to visit the chickens or meet the farmers.

Heading north, the Chef's House is a popular new spot in St. Joseph that just opened inside the Market last year with French and other European-influenced cuisine. The Market itself is a destination. The indoor farmers market and culinary cornucopia is open daily year-round. The chef in the house at Chef's House is Chicago native Justin Paruszkiewicz, who you may have seen winning an episode of "Guy's Grocery Games" on the Food Network.

Also in St. Joseph, chef Thrijani Kantareddy's strip mall restaurant KT's Rasoi Indian Cuisine is a must-stop to spice up your trip. Lunch is a simple combo plate (vegetarian or protein of the day), but dinnertime has more options, including samosa, dosi, butter chicken, dum biryani and more. She also sells Indian beer and desserts.

Melody Baetens / The Detroit News / TNS
Silver Beach in St. Joseph has a 2,450-foot beach of soft, white sand, a pier, playground, a carousel and is walkable to the downtown shops and restaurants.

Wine

This area is a wine-lover's paradise. There are so many small tasting rooms to visit, shops to explore and bottles to pop open. Scope them out on your own, or use the Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail to help guide you to tasting rooms that offer samples and information. Visit miwinetrail.com.

Darling downtowns

Michigan is rightfully known for its freshwater lakes, but how lucky are we to also have all these cute, quaint downtown pockets? Don't go to southwestern Michigan without a stroll through Three Oaks. Just five miles from the shore, this village has everything you'd need to entertain you for a day: restaurants, public art, antique shopping and live entertainment. Visit the Acorn Theater for performing arts or the Vickers for movies. Also along the strip of Elm Street is the Journeyman Distillery, which has a tasting room, tours and even lodging.

St. Joseph's downtown area is several blocks within walking distance of Silver Lake. Restaurants offer American, Chinese, Italian, Mexican and French cuisine, plus there are wine tasting opportunities, breweries, art galleries, a children's museum and loads of shopping at all price points. Foodies, don't miss the Olive Cart, a boutique that sells flavored olive oils, aged balsamic vinegars and other items to zhuzh up your cooking or grazing board at home. (And you can sample everything!)

Wellness

Some travel to drink and eat, but lately, many adults are looking for ways to improve their mind and body during a vacation. For you, that may mean a traditional spa experience like the one at the Harbor Grand Hotel in New Buffalo. The phone-free, adults-only oasis has a saltwater pool with a view of the water, a jacuzzi and services like facials, red-light therapy and massages.

The New Buffalo area also has the Dancing Feet Yoga studio, which has sound bath events, pilates and more. At the aforementioned Petit Acres, which is hosting free open house events this weekend, there's a focus on balancing activity and recovery. Hit the gym, sweat it out in the sauna or take a dip into a cold plunge. The property also has quiet yurts and nature trails.

For something a little different, but within the wellness space, take about a 20 minute drive inland from the Warren Dunes State Park area to Verdant Hollow Farms for a one-hour, slow-paced hike through woods and pastures with a herd of goats. The hikes, $25 per person, run May through October and are suitable for people older than five. Wear good shoes and leave the dogs and strollers at home. There is also lodging here (through Airbnb) and shopping opportunities for goat milk soap, cheese, eggs, chicken and more.

Casinos

The Four Winds casino in New Buffalo is a secluded gaming destination with a hotel, shopping, restaurants (including a buffet) and a concert hall with everything from live jazz to drag queens. The gaming floor has nearly 2,000 slot machines, plus table games, high-limit area and a sportsbook. There are other Four Winds Casino locations in the area in Hartford and Dowagiac, but the New Buffalo resort is the third largest casino in Michigan.